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PC PowerPlay

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CATASTROPHIC
GLITCHES?

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PC titles previewed!

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Creed: Syndicate
- > Fallout 4
- > Dishonored 2
- > Battleborn
and more!

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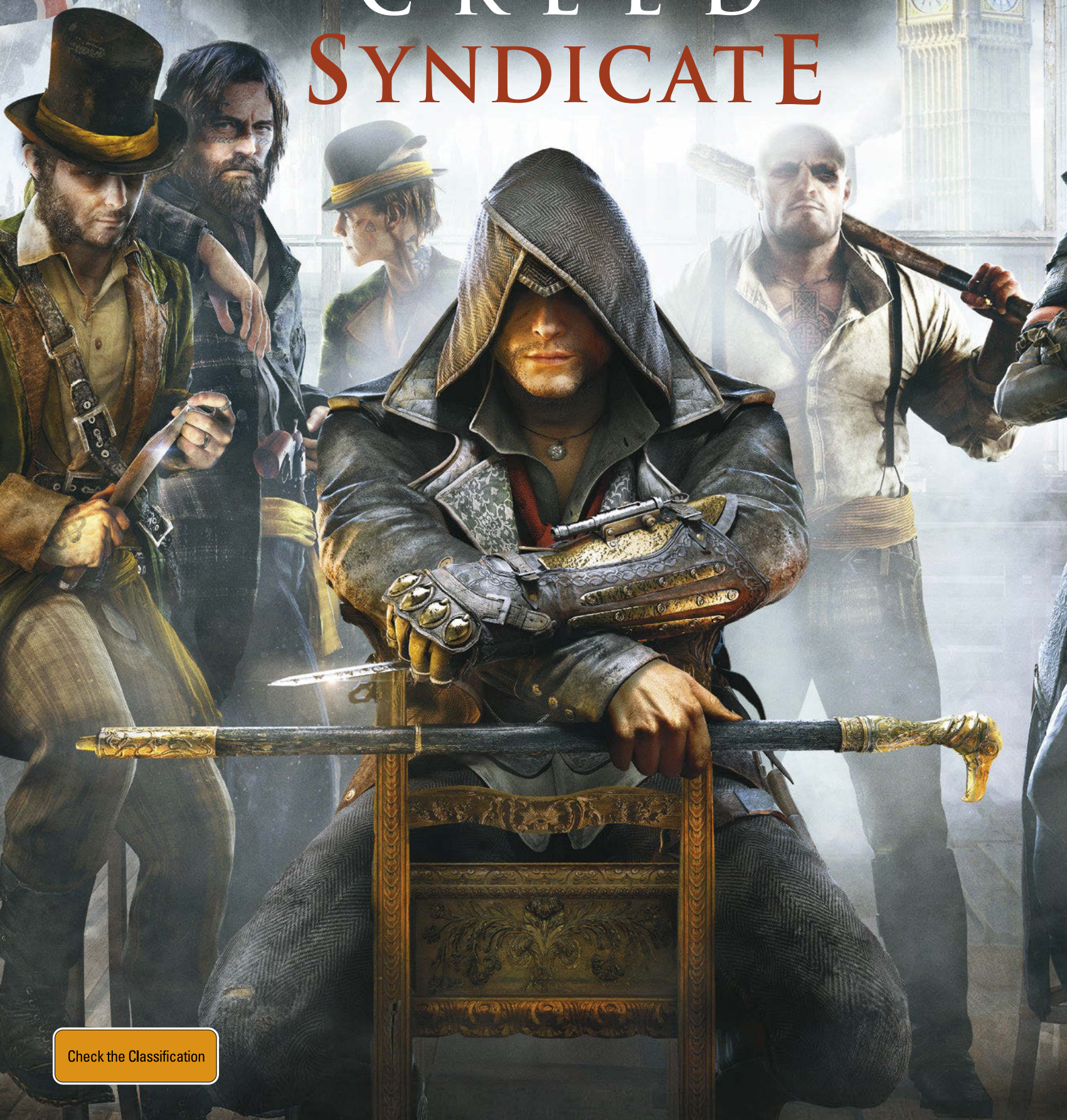
CAN BLIZZARD DOMINATE
THE MOBA MARKET?

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ASSASSIN'S —CREED— SYNDICATE



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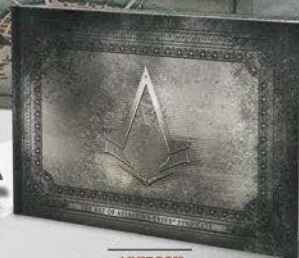
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ON THE COVER

ASSASSIN'S CREED: SYNDICATE

p. 36

Get ready to murder
people in the grimy
streets of London

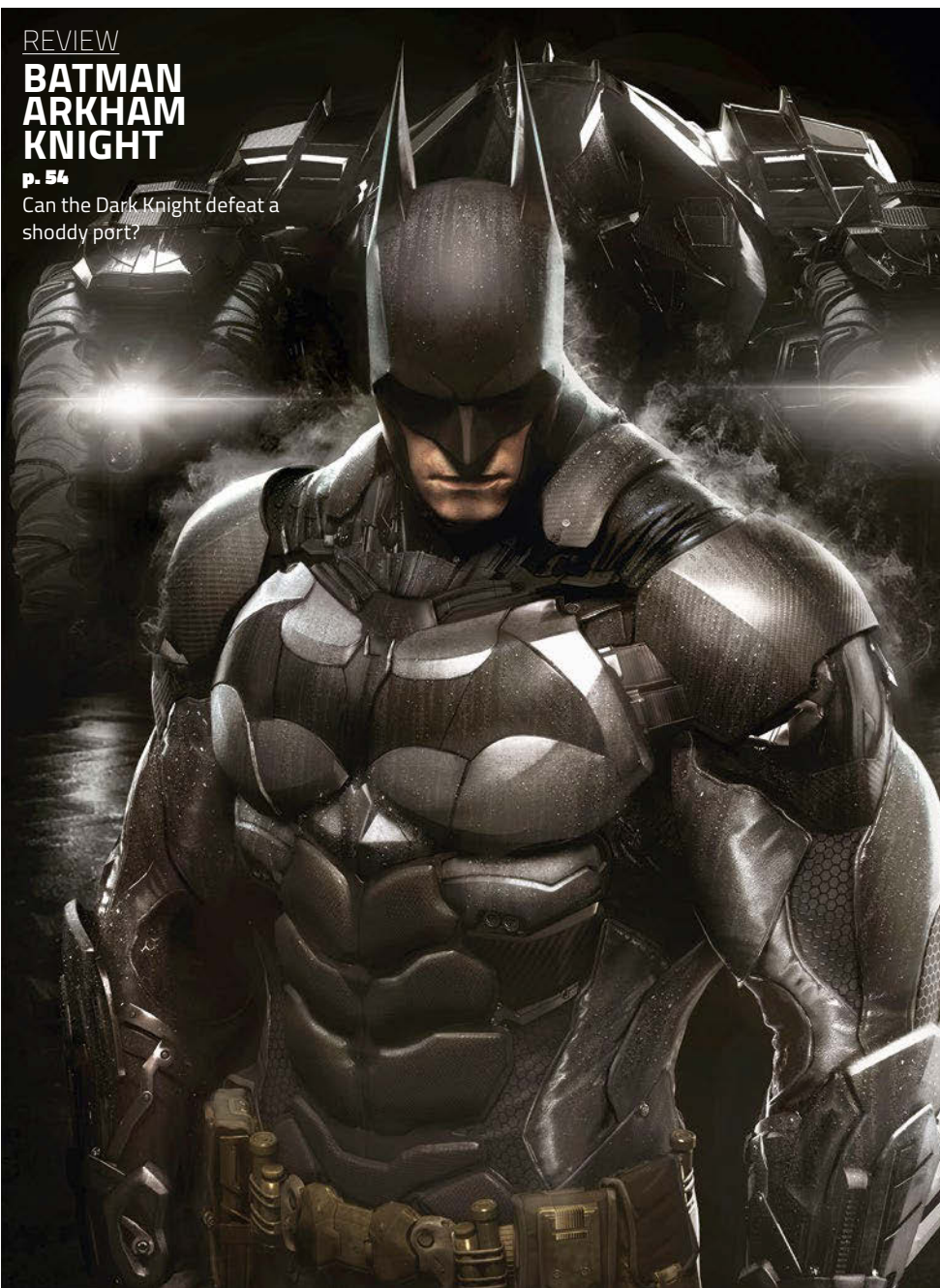


REVIEW

BATMAN ARKHAM KNIGHT

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Can the Dark Knight defeat a shoddy port?



TECH FEATURE RADEON R9

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AMD release their new slew of GPUs



TECH

AORUS X5

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Powerful gaming performance in a portable format



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Crazy Days

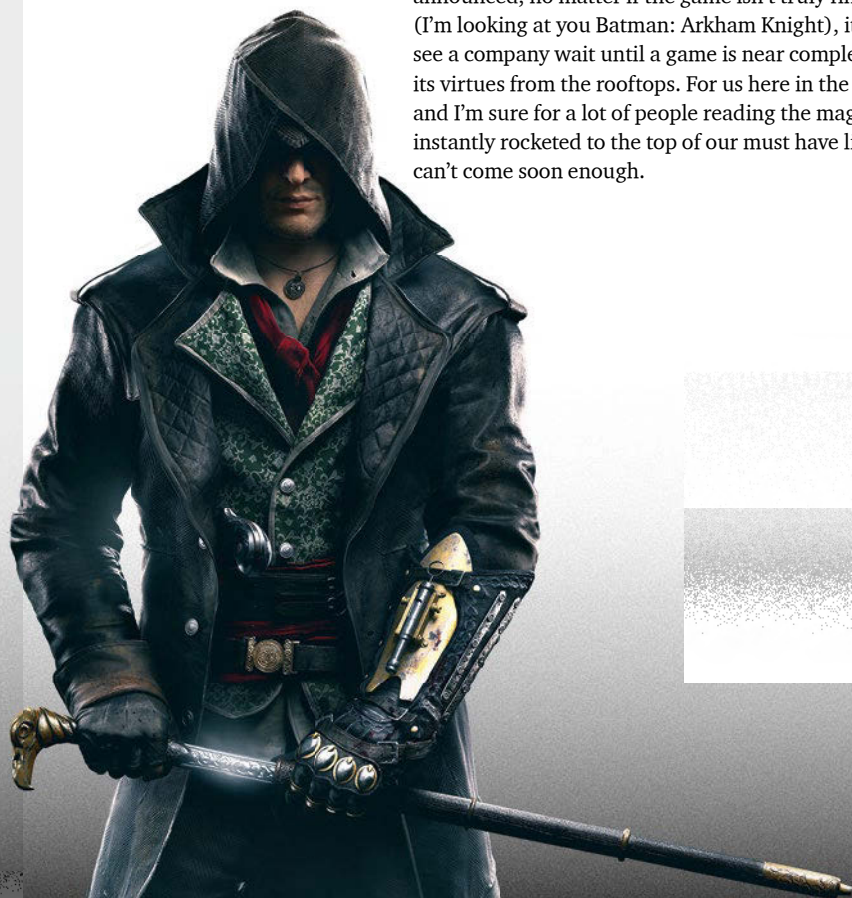
To say that this has been a crazy production cycle does not do the month credit. It has been insane, thanks to the timing of deadlines and events. Between June 3 and July 8 the PCPP team have put to bed three magazines – two issues of PC PowerPlay and one PC PowerPlay Tech Special, as well as a Games of the Future Hyper special. Everyone has bruised fingers and saddle sores from the amount of time we have spent sitting and typing. Not that we're complaining, mind you. It's an exciting time to be in the media. My first Computex in early June was an amazing experience. It served as a crash course in the tech trends I was behind on and I got to see the literal future of PC gaming tech, new chipsets, graphics card paradigms, mobos, displays and convergence technologies that will definitely affect the way we build our rigs in the years to come. Now that these crazy deadlines are out of the way it feels like we won't know what to do with ourselves and our regular monthly deadlines for the rest of the year.

Hot on Computex's heels came E3 2015 – definitely the most exciting E3 in years – thanks to the number of fantastic new IPs and great looking sequels coming our way in the next six to 12 months, including, of course, the hotly anticipated and long rumoured Fallout 4. For such an anticipated game it's amazing that Bethesda didn't do any promotion until now. It's been in development behind the scenes for years and is releasing in November. In a gaming landscape that sees games getting press and release windows, if not dates, as soon as they are announced, no matter if the game isn't truly finished by release (I'm looking at you Batman: Arkham Knight), it's refreshing to see a company wait until a game is near completion to trumpet its virtues from the rooftops. For us here in the PCPP bunker, and I'm sure for a lot of people reading the magazine, Fallout 4 instantly rocketed to the top of our must have lists. November can't come soon enough.

Daniel Wilks

Editor

@drwilkenstein



QUOTES OF THE MONTH

"It's like a full archery machine"

"Shut up, I'm tired and have forgotten how to... thing"

"We're having a conversation space"

PC PowerPlay

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See asus.com/au and windows.com/windows10upgrade. Pre-release product shown, subject to change.



THIS MONTH...



DANIEL WILKS
Repeatedly slept through his alarm
[@drwilkenstein](#)



MALCOLM CAMPBELL
Ate one sandwich



BENNETT RING
Fought Batman
[@bennettring](#)



JAMES COTTEE
Demanded a refund
[@j_cottee](#)



MEGHANN O'NEILL
Moulded young minds
[@firkraags](#)



JAMES O'CONNOR
Was born in war
[@jickle](#)



BEN MANSILL
Quit smoking



NATHAN LAWRENCE
Didn't contribute



ALESSANDRO GUARRERA
Dressed like Tony Montana
[@ALguarrera](#)



DAVID HOLLINGWORTH
Bought a broken horse



ALEX MANN
Took a break after E3



CAMERON FERRIS
Became a casualty of the rubber band wars
[@pcpowerplay](#)



SEAN FLETCHER
Broke his mouse

FRONTEND



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36 Assassins Creed: Syndicate

Sibling assassins take on the Templars and the London underworld



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We speak to Dave Pottinger, CEO of BonusXP



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The best of independent development



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THE RELEASE SCHEDULE

Looking ahead to the upcoming PC game releases

LEGEND:



Steam



Origin



Good Old Games



uPlay



Battle.net



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JULY



F1 2015
EA



MAGIC DUELS:
ORIGINS
WIZARDS OF THE
COAST



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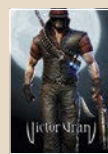
TEMBO THE
BADASS
ELEPHANT



GUILD OF
DUNGEONEERING
CAMBRINOUS



KING'S QUEST
SIERRA



VICTOR VRAN
HAEMIMONT
GAMES



AUGUST



BLOOD BOWL 2
CYANIDE



ROLLERCOASTER
TYCOON WORLD
AREA 52 GAMES



HYPER LIGHT
DRIFTER
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AMIKROG
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MIKE BITHELL



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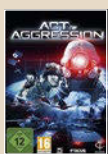
SHADOWRUN
HONG KONG
HAIRBRAINED
SCHEMES



SEPTEMBER



MAD MAX
AVALANCHE
STUDIOS



ACT OF
AGGRESSION
EUGEN SYSTEMS



SWORD COAST
LEGENDS
DIGITAL EXTREMES



mighty no. 9
concept



WAY OF THE
SAMURAI 4
ACQUIRE



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Q3/4



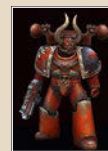
TOM CLANCY'S
RAINBOW SIX:
SIEGE
UBISOFT MONTREAL



TRANSFORMERS:
DEVASTATION
PLATINUM GAMES



FALLOUT 4
BETHESDA GAME
STUDIOS



WARHAMMER
40K: SPACE
WOLF
GAMES WORKSHOP



Inbox



LETTER OF THE MONTH WINS!

Write in to PCPP with your rants, considered opinions, and endless run-on sentences of pure awesome. The address is letters@pcpowerplay.com.au. Each letter read by hand! This Letter of the Month winner scores himself an ARC 100 Solid State Drive courtesy of the fine folks at OCZ!



LETTER OF THE MONTH THE FINAL FRONTIER

G'day again. Sorry to bug you but i thought you might like to see one of my past projects and my current project.

The first one on my YouTube channel took 5 years to complete. I started this before I started playing Eve Online.

I no longer have this ship as it was sold to a business man for his kids to play in, lol.

<https://youtu.be/oOFiLiGDIE4>

The next one is one I'm working on now which will eventually be 20 - 30 metres long and will be built in 3 sections. The first part is the cockpit that I'm working on now and will have multiple computers systems installed... eventually.

This will take an estimated 10 years to complete as I don't have the required money to build it most of it. So it's all baby steps.

<https://youtu.be/LA4H-FgOv2k>

And this one I built last year just for fun as I was bored. And I still have this as it's up for sale for half of what it cost to build \$1000, lol

Daytime video: <https://youtu.be/-VFsmnh389k>

Night-time Video: <https://youtu.be/j7u8Awrt3qk>

The neighbours thought I was nuts doing this lit up at Christmas, lol. Oh well we all have our hobbies.

Hope you enjoy mate and thank again for featuring my Pc setup.

Kind Regards

Jeremy Gill

Hi Jeremy – you're our favourite kind of nut. Someone who has a passion and is unafraid to explore that passion no matter what other people think. Everyone in the office has watched your vids and is more than a little envious of your ships. They're awesome, mate. Keep building bigger and better ships, and make sure you keep us up to date with your progress.

RESOLUTION

This year I've been trying to do a new thing. And that is having nothing to do with any type of preview regarding a game I'm looking forward to or movie I'm looking forward to.

I want to be blindsided rather than exposed to multi - trailers and endless photos.

I had to make one exception. And that was your preview of Star Wars: Battlefront.

The photos you showed was the game i was hoping it would be.

So now I will resist any more trailers or photos and know that your article covered everything I needed to know. Thank you.

Regards,

Mitchell Hall

Hi Michael – we can understand your desire not to know too much about upcoming releases, but unfortunately that isn't something we can do in our jobs. It can really detract from the ultimate excitement of a game. That said, sometimes the more you know about something the more you want to get your hands on the final product. Wilks spoke to CDPR multiple times and had hands on with The Witcher 3 long before it was released, but come the actual review code, it was all we could do to keep him in the office. Indie games are also a real pleasure, as most indies have no marketing budget so the first time we hear about them is when they are released.

FEEDBACK #241

► **Rhys Jennings:** I really enjoyed it. Love the front cover

► **Joshua Geraghty:** It would be cool if you guys had like a section where you re reviewed old school games (with a different rating system) n see how they held up and what u had to do to get them to work, what mods you used etc etc

► **Rob Thomas:** Needs more helvetica!!!

► **Luke G-Man:** Loved it. Especially the rainbow six special and the page about Tom Clancy himself.

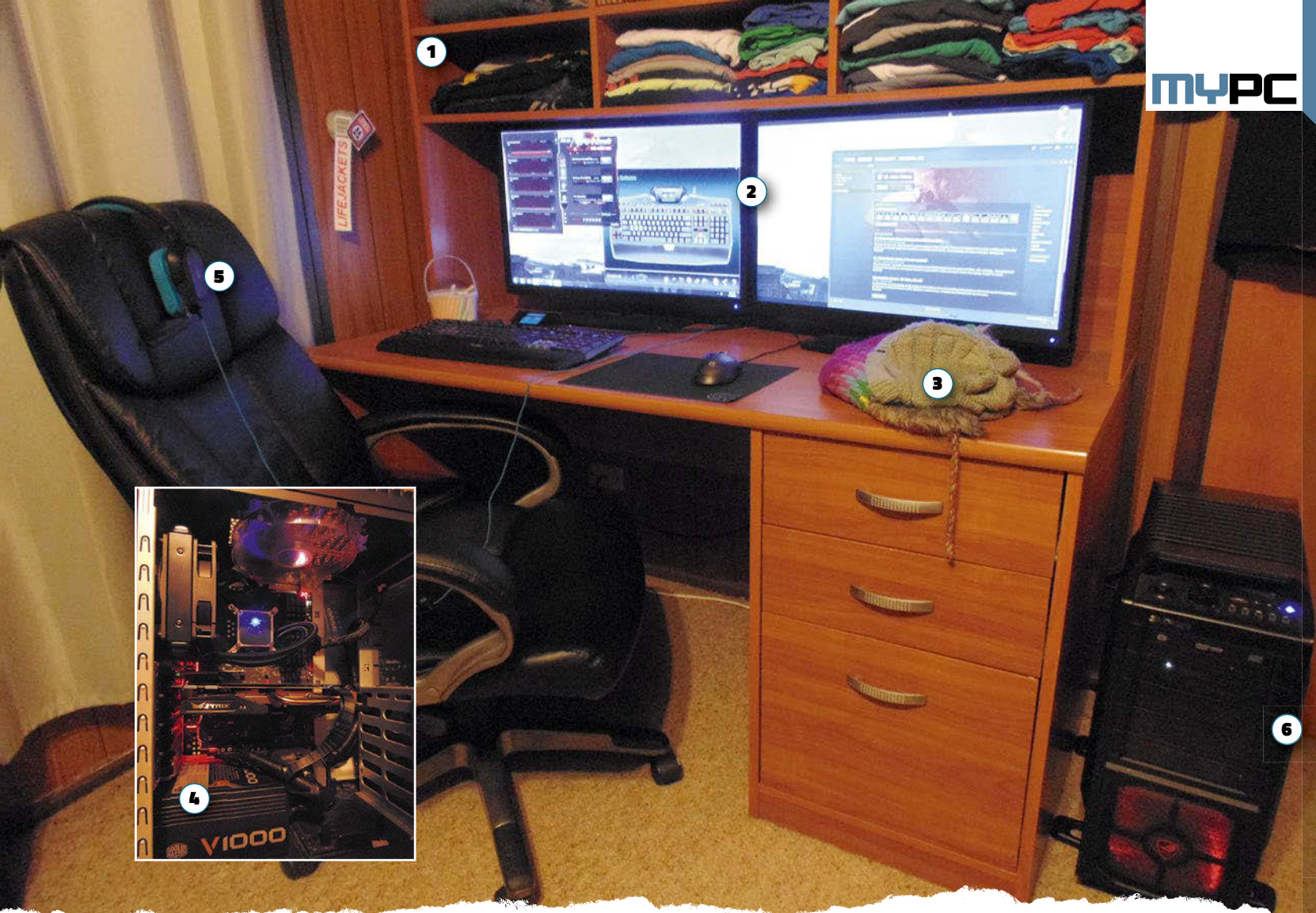
► **Corey Evans:** Too many spelling and grammar mistakes. If I'm going to read out dated news, I at least expect the quality to be better than what I read online.

► **davidbowie:** No Simpsons reference on front cover for "Regicide" 0/10 would not bang.

► **jaytee83:** Good issue, but I'd prefer My PC won by people (not necessarily me) with modest setups occasionally, as opposed to this month's winner who's trying to compete with Boeing.

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DAVID AGE 23 | BELMONT, NSW

This month's MY PC brought to you by

I'm writing you this email because I always wanted to enter your PC rig competition in your magazine but never had a cool computer until now.

4 MOST IMPRESSIVE ELEMENTS:

- 1) Asus Maximus V11 ranger motherboard. I love the bios. It makes it so easy for a 1st time PC builder to overclock.
- 2) Asus GeForce GTX 970 strix direct cu 11 4gb graphics card. I like the GPU tweak software.
- 3) 4 X 4gb of Kingston Hyper X Beast DDR3 memory gets the job done.
- 4) Intel core i7 4790k CPU also gets the job done.

LAST UPGRADE: My last upgrade was the TP-Link archer t8e Wi-Fi card. I needed it to connect to the home Wi-Fi

DREAM UPGRADE: My dream upgrade is to make a simple pilot gaming frame setup for star citizen to make a more immersive gaming experience using things like the oculus rift I think that would be pretty cool.

FAVOURITE FEATURE: My favourite feature are the 2 screens. It may not seem like much but it's just funny when people come over and they are just like "woow y you need 2 screens for?????"

WHY SO SPECIAL? My favourite thing about my PC is the fact I built it myself. I've never done that before and it was surprisingly easy but if I could go back in time I would do some things differently but that is just me being picky. I think it's pretty good for my 1st time. I think more people should give it a go.

1. These are the strangest looking disks we've ever seen
2. We would add your dual monitors to teh most impressive elements
3. Some kind of dead animal?
4. All the power you could need
5. Ears by Logitech
6. Nice work on a first build

DAVID WINS!

A swanky new K60 RGB keyboard valued at \$249 thanks to the good people at Corsair. Enjoy!



WANT FREE STUFF? Send your MyPC entry today to mypc@pcpowerplay.com.au. Include the four most impressive elements of its hardware, your last upgrade, your dream upgrade, your favourite feature and what you think makes your PC special. Make sure to include your name, age and location. And last but not least, attach a 5MP or bigger image of your PC! No camera phone shots, and make sure it's in focus!

WORLD OF WARSHIPS HITS OPEN BETA!

Come on in, the water is fine.

If you've been hearing about the closed beta test of Wargaming's World of Warships, and been wanting to get in on the action, this is your D-day.

The game has now hit open beta.

The closed beta slate has been wiped clean (which was a little alarming, we must say), but now you can join the rest of us and

see what might be Wargaming's best free to play title yet. It's slower and more deliberate than World of Tanks, and a much more polished sim than World of Warplanes, presenting a great take on naval combat before the age of the guided missile.

So sign up now, at <http://worldofwarships.asia/>



ARKHAM KNIGHT HAS BEEN PULLED FROM THE SHELVES IN AUSTRALIA

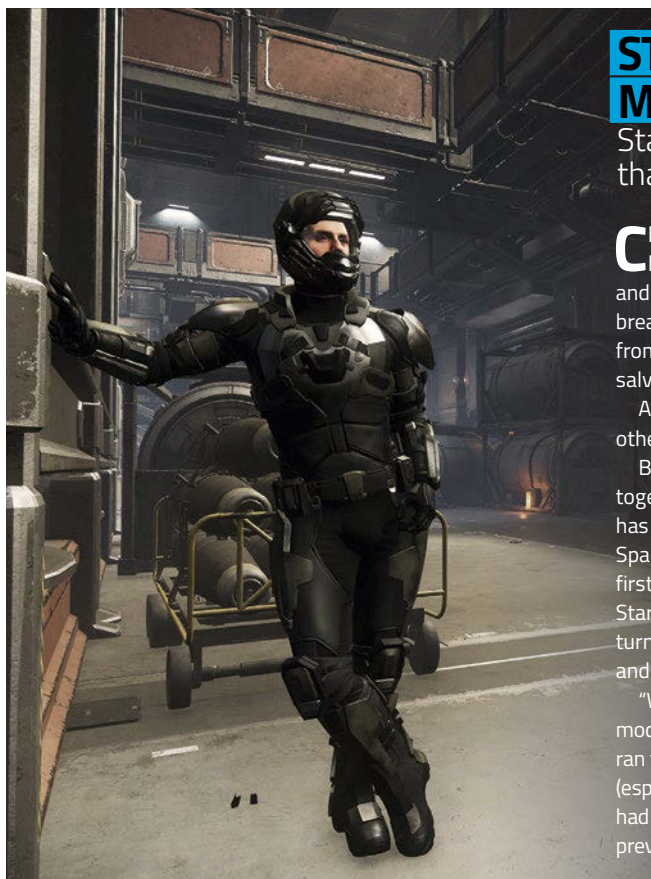
There are bad console ports - and then there's the new Batman game, apparently.

In an unprecedented move, Warner announced it was suspending sales of the troubled PC version of Batman: Arkham Knight, and subsequently the game has been pulled from shelves in two Australian chains.

Both JB Hi Fi and EB Games

have removed the game from sale, and are waiting to hear more from Warner about the next step in getting the game into a playable state.

Other retailers, such as Target, have simply chosen not to stock the PC version at all.



STAR CITIZEN'S STAR MARINE MODULE HITS HEAVY DELAYS

Star Citizen's FPS module is harder to develop than it first looked.

Chris Roberts wants Star Citizen to have everything. From 4K graphics and native VR support, to a living breathing world packed with ships from one-seater racers to multi-crew salvage cruisers, Star Citizen is big.

And, as backers, we want it no other way.

But some things aren't coming together, as the game-making auteur has just admitted on the Roberts Space Industries blog. Basically, the first person shooter part of the game, Star Marine, while looking amazing, is turning out to be quite the challenge, and will now be delayed.

"We demonstrated a build of the module at the backer event that ran fairly well. It lacked some polish (especially with animations) and still had several technical blockers that prevented a wide scale rollout...but

we felt confident enough in the work to say that it would be available for everyone soon. Unfortunately that didn't happen. Just over two months on, we are continuing to tackle technical and gameplay-related issues."

The game was meant to be out early next year, but that's now looking impossible. One of the big issues is the game's netcode, and given how much grief DICE cops over its Battlefield netcode, this is one part of a multiplayer shooter you really do want to get right first time. The reworking of netcode has of course caused knock-on issues for other parts of the game, which Chris goes into in remarkable depth in the blog.

There are also some great new screens of the module, so it certainly looks like something worth waiting for.

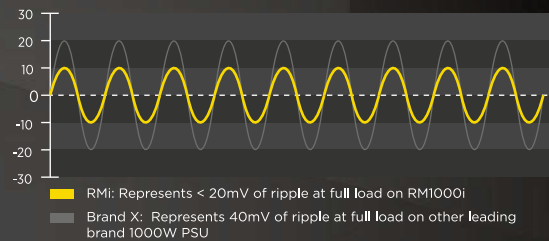


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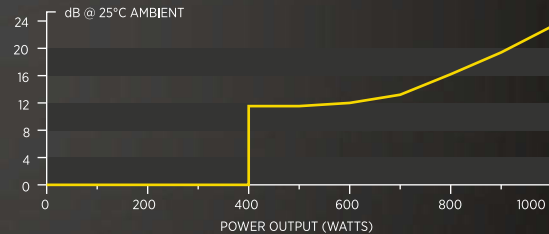
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DEMO FOR AUSTRALIAN GAME DEFECT: SPACESHIP DESTRUCTION KIT OUT NOW

Design a ship, fight in space, get tossed by your crew... rinse and repeat.

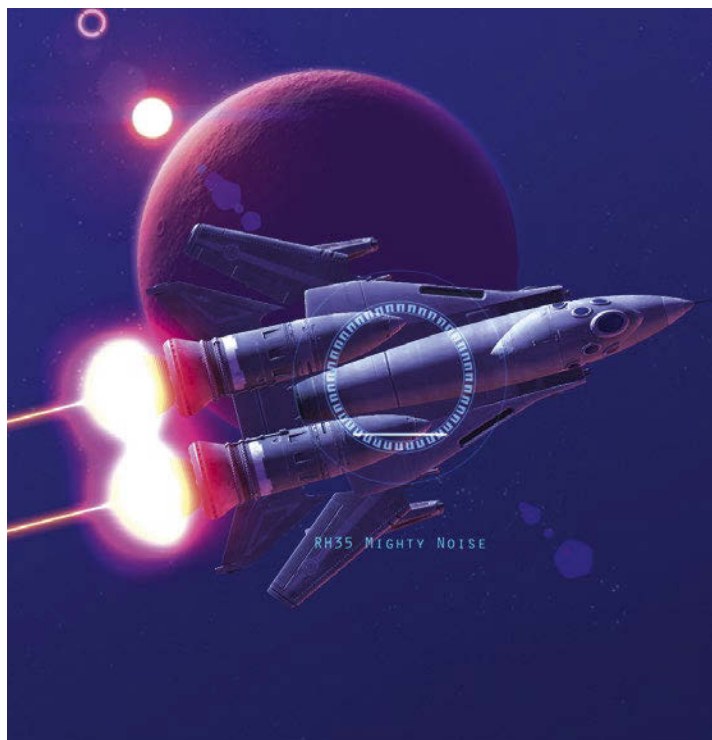
Australian based developer Three Phase Interactive has just released a demo (in this day and age!) for its space ship construction game Defect: Spaceship Destruction Kit, and it's looking like a lot of fun.

The game's premise is almost simple... you get to build a ship from a huge range of parts, and then you go out into space and blow up other ships. The wrinkle is that your crew will eventually mutiny, and steal your ship, at which point you need to build a new ship to go out and hunt them down.

Then your new crew does the same... The point is to make your ships tough, but not too tough. You need to build in defects that you can later exploit.

"We're big fans of sci-fi and construction games, so we're really excited to be working on our dream project" said Drew Morrow, lead designer/artist at Three Phase Interactive, in today's release. "We can't wait to see what ship designs and ideas players come up with."

You can download the demo on Steam.



ETERNAL CONFLICT RAGES IN HEROES OF THE STORM

The Butcher and other legendary characters from Diablo III enter the Nexus to continue the war over the High Heavens and the Burning Hells

Since the Nexus portal opened on June 3rd, players around the world have stormed the battlegrounds of Blizzard's cross-character combat arenas. Not content with the cacophonous, chaotic clashes, their conflict has inspired, Heroes of the Storm has introduced the Eternal Conflict, a multi-week in-game event. During the event, players should be on the lookout for Treasure Goblins. Players who track down these creatures and eliminate them before a match's end will receive gold for their efforts. What's more, the game's roster has been bolstered with three characters from the Diablo universe: The Butcher, Leoric, and The Monk, alongside several Diablo-themed skins and mounts.

Among the two new maps is the Battleground of Eternity, the first battleground located in one of Blizzard's established

universes. Players will need to defend their core and attack the enemy while supporting their Immortal, a massive angel, or demon, fighting its counterpart in the map's centre. Available in-game from today, the map has uniquely themed mercenaries with Battleground-specific powers.

The Butcher is a damage-dealing melee character who becomes stronger by

devouring his fallen enemies. His 'brand' ability debuffs enemies and lets him gain life with each attack. He can also bring Lambs to the slaughter, and chain his hapless victims to a post for four long seconds.

Leoric, the Mad King of Khanduras—best known the Skeleton King (cue a spinoff film starring Dwayne Johnson) — will be the next Warrior to join. Like all members of the living-impaired, Leoric is rather averse to staying dead; in game, this means whenever he is slain, he will rise as a wraith to haunt his enemies. As a ghost, his attacks slow his enemies and accelerate his eventual resurrection.

The Monk is a versatile melee support hero who can heal allies, and choose between two hero-defining Traits to fulfil the needs of his team. Using a variety of martial magic and holy hand-to-hand combat, the Monk will bring his traditional arts to bear in Heroes of the Storm.



SEE THE LIGHT

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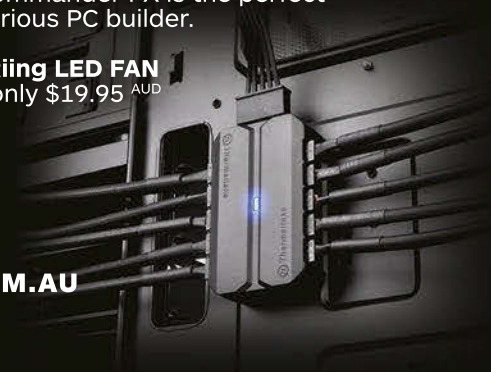
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Trend Setting

Who chooses gaming's next big thing?

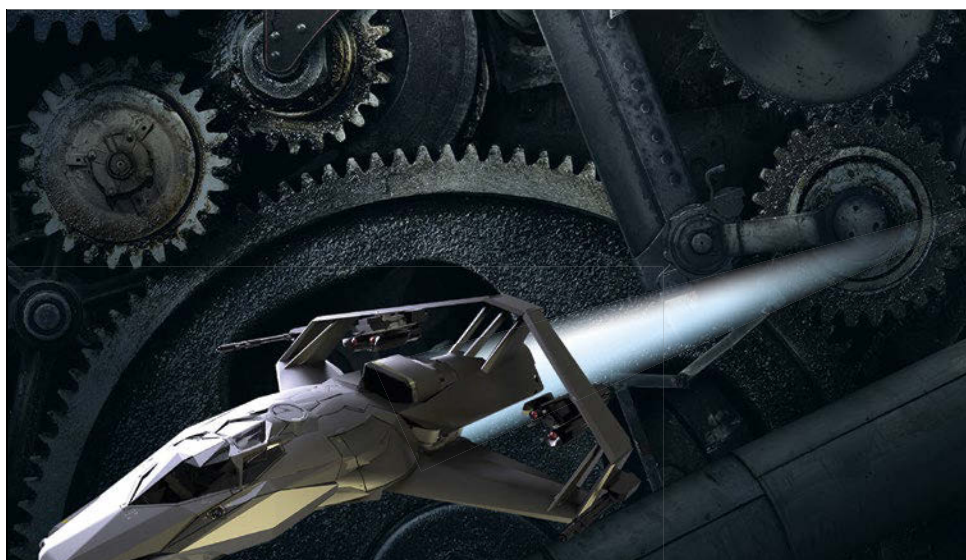
I think we can safely say that gaming has now fully and entirely mirrored music as a model of cultural and creative evolution. By and large, all the genres were nailed down years ago, leaving us with sub-genres within sub-genres, each flaring up for a span before being washed away by the next new-old thing. The big reliable IPs are churned out year after year, consumed by mainstream gamers who, anecdotally at least, appear unwilling to take risks on anything too niche. And what is old is new again, with the surge in retro gaming, which is now fully into the remake and remastered era.

I'm going to resist the easy temptation to roll out some terrible analogies – like how Call of Duty is sort of big and bland like American Idol. Or id Software is a bit like Green Day – once cool and edgy, but the flame appears to have burned out. Whoops, there go the analogies.

But it is. Especially when you've got remakes and remasters that are enjoyed by gamers who weren't around when the original was a hit. Or even more telling, that they don't care that there was an 'original', and may even be a little surprised to discover what they're playing is in fact a remake.

I'd say this is simply a natural consequence of being a cultural thing that now spans generations.

With the games scene now all neatly compartmentalised by genre, development is now more sales science than creative exploration – at least for the AAAs. Driven by data, developers can tailor a game precisely for almost-guaranteed success. Not only does a developer track what's shifting off the virtual shelf, they also look at which DLCs worked and which flopped.



That's no surprise, of course, but games offer a unique opportunity to track what a player is actually doing while playing, and for how long, and to use that data to further finesse new games.

IGN did a nice interview with the Mass Effect devs a few years ago covering just this. There were no startling revelations – they looked at which character classes were most, and least, popular (Soldier most, Engineer least), as well as getting some important confirmation that people were actually enjoying the dialogue.

It all shapes future game design, and in this data-driven world, digital entertainment is particularly trackable.

■ Most people like what most other people like. We seek acceptance, so gravitate towards what the biggest crowd seems into. That's why boring shit is popular. ■

Does this mean some of the bigger titles are becoming homogenised? Hell yes, it does. The gameplay in Call of Duty is so perfectly fine tuned that the devs can focus on whatever the year's trendy setting is.

Therein lays another challenge for devs – planning for trends. If you can be sharp about a 12 month development cycle, that then offers some protection against the whims of the market, but not all are so fortunate. Could it be that Chris Roberts and Star Citizen will be behind the space curve when that game finally hits? While Elite: Dangerous

helped the current space-phase along, some Kerbals probably did too, the rush of me-too space games is getting a bit much, even for a tripper like me who spends half his waking hours on an imaginary spaceship on the other side of the known universe. Will we be spaceweary when Star Citizen comes out? If we're not, we sure will be a year later when the late-comer devs jump on the space bandwagon.

Most people like what most other people like. We seek acceptance, so gravitate towards what the biggest crowd seems into. That's why boring shit is popular. The lowest common denominator always wins.

That makes it so very much more exciting when something actually cool springs up from seemingly nowhere, and explodes. Has a week on Steam gone by when another open world survival game hasn't blazed into early access? That's where it's at right now, pretty much thanks to DayZ.

While we haven't quite left the spec-ops trend completely behind us as we lurch forward into Steampunk London, or deep space, that's a boat that's sailed. In that case, current world affairs initiated that theme and in the end, our weariness of the daily death news from the Middle East quite likely hastened its withering demise. What was exciting one day became ugly and distasteful the next.

That particular circle took a very long decade to turn. Now, it seems, we're backing away from reality and turning to escapism in unreal worlds. What will be next? All I know is that change is enough in itself, to fuel interest, and that Taylor Swift can't possibly last much longer at the top. **PC**



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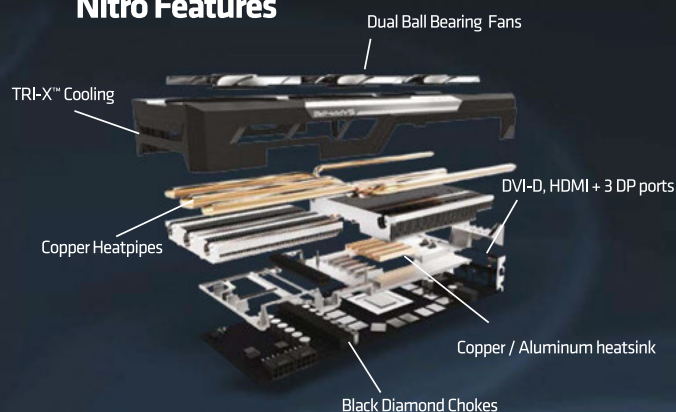
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Deus Ex: Mankind Divided

DEVELOPER EIDOS MONTREAL
PUBLISHER SQUARE ENIX
DUE 2016
www.deusex.com

Two years after the events of Deus Ex: Human Revolution, the Czech Republic is in chaos. The events of the previous game, and further machinations by the Illuminati have turned the augmented into targets for angry “naturals”. Can Adam Jensen stop terrorists from both sides of humanity?

The Gift of Fear

Steam Refunds are here, and some people are furious. The developers doth protest too much, methinks...

Valve's digital download service Steam is no longer a mere convenience. It is now so ubiquitous, so instrumental to our gaming hobby, that for all purposes and intents it has become a utility – and you only really think about utilities when they let you down. When the lights go dark. When you turn the tap, and nothing comes out. It's only then that we recall Immortan Joe's warning: if you become addicted to something, you will resent its absence.

It wasn't that long ago that Valve revised the Steam terms and conditions to state that by accepting said terms and conditions one waives all rights to participate in a class action lawsuit. Complaints gushed forth, but they sputtered and died away. Then came another two furphy magnets: Steam Greenlight and Steam Curators, attempts to automatically funnel the unending chocolate rain of fair-to-middling titles.

Steam's paid mod service was so poorly received that it was quickly pulled, perhaps to return some day in a less inflammatory form. Coupled with their steadfast refusal to release Half-Life 3, for a while there it seemed like the game wizards at Valve were completely out of touch with their user base.

So imagine our surprise when they announced Steam Refunds. This new feature grants customers the right to a refund within a fortnight of purchase, provided they've played the game for less than two hours. Finally: solace for the common man. For those who buy a game only to learn that their computer doesn't have the juice to run it. For those who find the game-breaking bugs of a new release insurmountable



barriers to enjoyment. Finally: An antidote to the Buyer's Remorse.

As of this writing the ACCC still isn't entirely satisfied with Valve's behaviour, but this is a step in the right direction – a level of consumer protection so basic it's a small wonder they haven't implemented it sooner. Even devs love it. On Twitter, Stardock founder Brad Wardell praised the move: "As a greedy capitalist, I support anything that makes people more likely to spend their money. Generous return policies are good business... Stardock has had a similar return policy for years. Not because we're 'nice' but because it makes potential customers more willing to buy."

■ And yet, in defiance of all reason, there were some who criticised this new policy ■

And yet, in defiance of all reason, there were some who criticised this new policy, implying that Valve's paying customers had ideas above their station. One indie dev flat out declared: "You aren't entitled to enjoy everything you buy." Got that? Punters who expect refunds for defective products are wallowing in a culture of entitlement.

It's difficult to tell if this is what he honestly believes, or if he was simply trolling for attention, seeking to milk some free publicity. After all, the developers of Hatred have openly admitted that their entire marketing campaign was geared to generate and feed on media outrage. And they succeeded! No matter how damning,

every editorial, every hit piece, every tweet played right into their hands. An obscure Polish studio sprung to global prominence, overnight. And with such splendid timing! For now those who quickly tire of their monochrome twin-stick shooter can claw back their emo-bucks.

This is a win for consumers, and for freedom of choice. But all the same, one can't help but wonder if we're getting too much of a good thing. Are there too many new games these days? Are there too many indies? Is the next generation of young developers doomed to a life of poverty?

I recently asked an established local developer whether he believed there is currently an over-supply of graduates from tertiary video game development courses. His answer surprised me: "No." He compared this education sub-sector to the world of ballet, of all things. Many youngsters study ballet, but very few become prima donnas. Do the rest feel ripped off? Not really: "They do it for the experience." Perhaps this was his polite way of saying that not every starry-eyed university student is destined to be an indie dev sensation, any more than career-conscious primary schoolers are destined to become firemen or astronauts.

So: is there a culture of entitlement in gaming? Maybe. Some might argue that given their track record of late, the ambitions of Peter Molyneux and Denis Dyack are delusional. Their persistence is admirable, but they do not have a 'right' to my money, or to yours.

If a video game developer is honestly afraid of giving unsatisfied customers refunds, then maybe his gut is trying to tell him something. **PC**



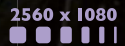
JAMES COTTEE wants a refund for all the times we've made a joke about him being a robot

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WHO DAVE POTTINGER
WHERE BONUSXP
WHY SERVO

With its short battles, unique look, and endless customisation, Servo is gearing up to change the way we think about real-time strategy. We talk to BonusXP CEO **Dave Pottinger** about the future of war...

While the studio name may be unfamiliar to most gamers, the staff at BonusXP have a truly impressive pedigree. Founder Dave Pottinger was once the lead programmer at Ensemble Studios, where he and his team created Age of Empires, Age of Mythology, and Halo Wars. Microsoft rewarded their achievements by disbanding their studio, so when we got a chance to speak to Dave it seemed logical to ask about the nature of his relationship with BonusXP's new publisher, Stardock. Will things be different this time?

"I think the biggest difference between this relationship and the Ensemble/Microsoft one is that BonusXP is an independent developer (whereas Ensemble was eventually owned by Microsoft). Stardock has been fantastic to work with in that setup. Even though BonusXP owns the game (another difference relative to the Ensemble/Microsoft relationship), Stardock has been right there with us all the time. Stardock has just as much experience making games as we do, so it's really been fun to see the melding of these two longtime strategy game developers."

Considering his team's track record of making of quasi-historical RTS games, Servo seems quite the departure. But the truth is, this game has been a long time coming. "We've been dying to make a sci-fi game forever. I think we look back to the masters in terms of inspiration. Asimov, Herbert, etc. All the books we read as kids. Star Wars, Aliens, etc. All the movies we watched growing up. When we started BonusXP, we held off doing a sci-fi game until we had a large enough team to do it right. It has been a dream come true to work on a setting like this."

"When we sat down to work on Servo, we knew we wanted something unique. Truth be told, Servo originally had much smaller robots. Human-sized things. That wasn't

going the way that we wanted it. Then, our concept artist, Andy Cotnam, blew us away with one of his secret treatments. He had jacked the Servos up to 40m in height and they were fighting giant monsters. Done and done!"

In another radical departure, battles in Servo are designed to be all over in 10-15 minutes – a far cry from the hour-long build up in your typical RTS. "That game-length goal was originally driven more by what we wanted as players. I think we just wanted the option to have a shorter experience, plain and simple. When I think about sitting down for an hour to play a game, I maybe pause a little. When I know that the game can be over in 15 minutes, I'm always in."

■ ■ In another radical departure, battles in Servo are designed to be all over in 10-15 minutes ■ ■

"Put another way, the timeframe is about giving the player options. If I want to play for 15 minutes, I can. But, I can also still sit down and play Servo for hours on end. In fact, we just had a company playtest session today that I had to call off after 90 minutes so we could get some work done on our milestone."

So how do you compress the quintessential RTS experience into such a small time-frame? "For us, RTS games are about choices. You always need and want to do more than you can, so how you choose to spend your resources and prioritise your time is what determines how you play. In all of the Age of Empires games that we worked on, there were all these interesting balance choices between investment vs. immediate

reward, economy vs. military, offence vs. defence, and rush vs. boom. With Servo, our goal is to bring the spirit of those decisions into the game. We've found that you don't need to have 40 villagers running around to have a game with a strong economy vs. military choice."

"That implies the obvious challenge in bringing a big RTS game down to 10 or 15 minutes. RTS games are big, nasty beasts with a lot of stuff. When we made Halo Wars, the first thing that was prototyped was taking Age of Mythology and making it playable with the gamepad. Just about every single feature, too. In hindsight, I think that was a mistake. We could never 'let go' of anything in that process."

Dave and his crew learned a great deal from the Halo Wars experience. "With Servo, our method has been to start with the absolute minimum feature set. As an example, when we put resources in for the first time, there was only one thing you could buy with them. We didn't have drones for the longest time, either. Once we feel like we understand how the game is playing, we take stock of where it's lacking. Sometimes, that results in adding a feature. Then we wait. We don't throw more than two features into the game in a week. We need time to see how they affect the game. Half the time, we pull the features out because they take the game in the wrong direction or add complexity without a commensurate amount of fun or interest."

All of these decisions can be made free from interference from the higher-ups because, as Dave put it, their higher-ups aren't very high up. "We sit right next to everyone and have daily tasks for both our games. We don't have anyone who's removed from development tasks at all. On the flip side, we also have a very flat studio. We don't really have leads. We involve everyone in the design process."



The downside of that is that we sometimes meander, but the upside is tremendous. Once we're aligned, it's a raucous, passion-filled train that continually builds on its momentum."

Another radical departure for Servo is its vivid use of colour, completely at odds with the post-apocalyptic status quo of brown and grey. "We wanted Servo to be different and stand out. We wanted a Servo screenshot to be something that everyone recognised instantly.

"I think that goes straight back to two things:

"One is Bruce Shelley's statement about the look of Age of Empires. He was, and still is, fond of saying that the 'sun always shines in Age of Empires.' That sounds trite, but it actually makes a difference. Age was a unique game at the time. The history angle wasn't really done in RTS games when Age came out, but its vibrant art was also a massive piece of the appeal.

"Second, we are going back to those glorious, colour-filled book covers from old sci-fi paperbacks. We love Aliens, but sci-fi doesn't have to be all black and grey. Done right, colour can add some fun elements to the game. After all, we have 40m tall giant robots walking around beating the snot out of each other with chainsaw arms and building-sized swords. It's okay to have fun in that world."

Servo is already in Early Access, but the fundamental game mechanics are still in flux, particularly the combat state system. "For example, when a Servo takes cold damage, that might come with a chance for that Servo to get 'frozen' (turns blue, lots of icy looking FX get added to it, it moves and does actions at 50% speed, and it gets a bit of armour). When that happens, now suddenly all your gear takes on a different meaning. Most people think of getting frozen as bad. You can't move very well and your actions are all slowed down. But, that armour might be something that keeps you alive longer. We've seen players intentionally freeze their own stuff just for that benefit.

"I like those kinds of things personally, so I tend to focus on a play style with lots of Servo active abilities and fewer drones to back them up. Of course, if my crowd control Servo gets stunned, then it's hard to keep all the enemy drones in check."

In parting, we asked what Dave considered to be the single most important stand-out feature of Servo. What makes it fundamentally different from every RTS to date?

"That's an easy one. It's the core vision; the marriage between an RTS and Diablo-style progression. You play this tight, fun RTS game. It's a hectic ride filled with giant robots beating the crap out of each other. A great deal of explosions are involved. And, then you get this loot that changes how your robots work. So, between matches, you take a second to swap out gear.

"Then, you do it all over again. Except, this time it's fundamentally different because you've chosen different Servo parts. It's that sense of immediacy and power that grabs folks straight away. Servo is familiar enough that people know exactly what to do, but all the limits are removed. You get to make your own Servos and that changes everything."

You can find more information on Servo at servogame.com. JAMES COTTEE

Neon Garden

Control, power, subversion, technology and, ultimately, humanity.

If someone were to blackmail you, what would they use? What special thing, when threatened, could fundamentally undermine your integrity and influence how you might act? In *Technobabylon*, a recently released adventure from Wadjet Eye Games and Technocrat Games, Regis' abandons his loyalty to the CEL police force when items of great personal value are stolen. It's a compelling premise that permeates the narrative. The violence these items are subjected to is shocking in a way that should be theoretical to most (but not all) current audiences, yet Regis' motivations are entirely plausible.

Set in 2087, the world has changed enough to provide intriguing context, but not so much that we can't relate to the action. It is a precise balance that makes for an excellent story, relying on the unfamiliar for its twists and turns. If someone installs a communication device inside the old cop's head, for example, via *wetware* and a thermos, you can understand his chagrin. What about a restaurant that serves human meat? Maybe in 70 years, there will be a case for it, ethically and logistically. Maybe? *Technobabylon* nearly has me convinced. It's clever like that.

I have to admit to loving stories that are futuristic and dystopian. Little details, like class division being as explicit as the materials your cutlery is made from, suggest a certain model of social control. More, that every knife and fork are recycled and remade after each use seems surprisingly wasteful, unless you can imagine why this might be so. Of course, utensils, plastic or metal, are useful for solving puzzles, right? World building accents directly relate to how puzzling is structured



and this further draws the player into understanding the context.

For example, what precisely is “*wetware*”, the nanotechnology Latha is growing in her bathroom? Could it be used to solve a puzzle? Similarly, the synthetic lifeforms you will encounter are a mix of useful, hilarious and peculiar. How do they work? There are puzzles designed around finding this out, including literally messing around inside their brains. In particular, mixing personality, role and memory of different synths can make for some amazing results.

Often running out of power just when you need them, the non-human characters are mostly meant as light

society's underclass. Her conversations reveal a lot about the treatment of orphans, the unemployed and Trance addicts, even explaining how city kids are named after abundant foods. One of the best moments in the game is when you briefly play a fourth character in a flashback. This is a story told from many points of view.

Fleshed out with generous dialogue and descriptions, it is a narrative experience but one that is well supported by music and art. You will hear a mix of ambient sounds, gentle electronic tracks and dramatic cues. As to the pixel art style, “That looks like an eighties game,” said my passing non-gamer spouse, then, “No, it doesn't. It has amazing light, shade, depth and movement.” Ben Chandler, who I interviewed for Generation XX a few years ago when he was working on amateur projects, hasn't made something that “looks eighties” so much as a nostalgic dream.

Horribly, the goriness is also very detailed. I started off playing this with my seven year old son but quickly realised that the content is actually meant for an adult audience. *Technobabylon* gave me pause to count how many adventures I've played with severed hands as inventory items. More than a few.

Despite the pervasive influence of technology, this is a human story. Antagonists might try to manipulate Regis, but there is much greater power in his sharing with friends. I've enjoyed a lot of adventures from Wadjet Eye and the developers they partner with, but the link between the unfamiliar, yet relatable, narrative and the organic puzzling makes this an exceptional example. **PC**

■ gave me pause to count how many adventures I've played with severed hands ■

relief, although their dialogue is excellent. The human characters include people of different genders, backgrounds and sexual orientations. There are older and younger people, as well as the Avatars they represent themselves as, anonymously, in the Trance. People access the virtual world for fun, subversion, escape or as the result of addiction. Hooking up can require the use of a Trance Den, if your power is out or your family is tired of your behaviour.

Generally, as the story progresses, you will play as one character and then the next, although you must choose how to switch between all three in the closing stage of the game. As well as CEL agent Regis, you will control Max, his partner, and Latha Sesame, from



MEGHANN O'NEILL hopes her eventual retirement into *The Trance* is full of adventure games and pixel art.



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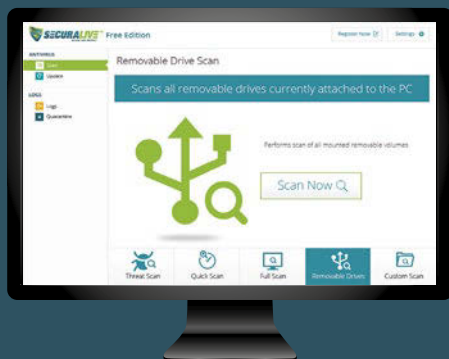
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A Collection Aside



Despite being useless at platformers, **MEGHANN O'NEILL** has included three this month, out of five games. They range from challenging and being underpinned by clever aspects of play, to artistic/experimental, showing the breadth of the genre. To offset feelings of inadequacy, however, she has also chosen a supremely accessible co-op arena shooter, locally developed, and a frightening series of adventures. Hold on to your silly hat. And your eyeball. No, seriously.

KALIMBA

DEVELOPER PRESS PLAY
PRICE \$10
pressplay.dk/games/kalimba/

RELEASED

■ It's not easy being green, when there's a purple force field between you and the next place to be, but this is why you brought your purple friend along. You can stand on his head, be propelled higher when he jumps or just observe as he negotiates the purple safely, switching places whenever you like. Wait, though. Green forcefield? That means he's using you, too, for the equal and opposite purpose. You know what else is weird? He moves exactly as you move, all the time.

Kalimba is a puzzle platformer where two characters, the puppets of a shaman's spirit magic, act as the result of one control scheme. Often, they are on separate tracks, so one will be jumping over a harmless floor, where the other would have fallen into some horrendous abyss. It lends the action a strange, "black magic" feeling, to see one half of the team behaving nonsensically. Other times, your actions will stack the totems or utilise terrain for positioning, so they can work together.

The game starts modestly, incrementally adding more ways to play. Soon enough, you will be working with opposing gravitational pull, teleporters and mass cannons. Interestingly, towards the very end of the singleplayer campaign, new mechanics make things noticeably easier. Generally, Kalimba is a difficult game and a gradual slide towards the ending is actually really nice. I'm not great at platformers, so I often give up 90% of the way through, despite wanting to know how things conclude.

The levels are designed so that you learn new tricks slowly, and with enough time to initially think, "Oh, I need to jump, no switch, no jump," and be able to do exactly that, landing gracefully. A



few puzzles later, you are expected to, "jump, switch, switch, jump," marveling that that actually worked. You knew what to do and you did it first time. Eventually, most

puzzles will require multiple attempts and consideration, especially when you are being propelled forwards by ice or enemies.

No matter how many times you die, if you get to the end of a level, you can progress. Cleverly, you collect little musical tokens which add up to making your totem pole pretty. Who cares about pretty? Well, your deaths are subtracted from the final score, making your totem pole ugly. Still don't care? You will. My totem pole was fabulous at the bottom, then just chunks of wood as it got taller. By the way, if your overall total is zero, you get an ironic clapping sound effect.

There is a co-op mode where, you guessed it, two players control four characters. It's utter mayhem. I played with my non-gamer spouse. There was much, "Get on top, you asshole," and, "Stop touching the pink bits, you idiot," and excited screaming when we actually got to a checkpoint. I have no idea how the neighbours thought we were spending Friday night. It is really confusing. Is it fun? Probably, if both players are very patient.

For the price, there is plenty of content, also including challenges within levels. A \$6 DLC will buy you an incredibly difficult, dark campaign. The developers also plan to release more free and paid expansions. It's a formula you can build on, probably endlessly. With cute art and music that dynamically adds percussion to movement, it's also nicely presented. Think of Kalimba like synchronised swimming meets Mario, and test your platforming mojo, twofold.



SQUARE HEROES

DEVELOPER GNOMIC STUDIOS
PRICE \$10
www.squareheroes.com

RELEASED

■ One of the great things about sourcing content for these independent gaming pages is that I can follow game development, and the people doing it, over time. I first saw Square Heroes at PAX Australia in 2013 and I recall it as being so immersive, I could momentarily ignore the madness of the indie pavilion, just to get lost in something really fun. Recently, at full release, I got so busy playing the campaign that I forgot to put my kids to bed. This game speaks right to my inner escapist.

Firstly, it's an arena shooter that is incredibly easy to pick up and play, especially with a controller. It's also multiplayer, so you can easily share the experience, even with whoever has just dropped around for a cuppa, gamer or not. This is not to say, necessarily, that it is easy to win. Weapons come in a range of hilarious melee implements, including the bone and the rubber chicken, where firearms are a mix of quick, accurate, wonky, ammo-hungry and incredibly powerful. Choose wisely.

At the beginning of each match, you choose your loadout and then unlock these weapons progressively as you collect coins. This makes for tentative initial play which gradually transforms to riskier. You can certainly zoom away from an enemy who is wielding a spanner, but less easily from a grenade launcher. Of course, the potential for blowing yourself up accidentally also increases incrementally. When all your weapons are unlocked, coins then buy health/ammo suitcases you can carry with you.

There are a variety of levels to play in. Each has areas that spawn heal/ammo packs, and a mystery box, which may restore health or ammo, or provide coins. Depending on the challenge, staying near one of these can be a good strategy. If you are simply trying to survive while other



players blow each other up, having ready access to health is good. Alternatively, once you have the big guns, staying close to ammunition can allow you to consistently blast anyone who comes too close.

Another gameplay mode is "gnome hunt" where the little fellers pop (fairly) randomly into existence and you claim them by standing close by while a little circle fills. Being vulnerable to attack while you wait, it is helpful to have a precise ranged weapon equipped. Alternatively, if someone else is at the gnome, blast them with something powerful or just rush in and bonk them on the head with a club. Although death has no scoring consequence here, having to respawn is time away from gnome claiming.

Learning to play through the single player campaign is useful, but not really necessary. There is some very light story to this and weirdly adorable creatures to meet and play

against/with. The AI is a worthy opponent and ally, gradually playing less forgivingly as the campaign progresses. You get a sense of who the aliens are and some insight into the setting. I'm not sure I'd unreservedly recommend Square Heroes, however, unless you intend to play multiplayer, too.

Luckily, there is a bundle providing three copies for the price of two, so that's helpful. The (relatively) limited scope to gameplay, combined with emergent strategies used among friends, strangers and foes, makes for really fun times. I have to admit my favourite thing about the game is still what I wrote up from PAX 2013; the evocative facial expressions to your square and its constantly worried manner. It complements the action perfectly.



BOTTLE ROCKETS

MADE FOR JAMES EARL COCKS III
PRICE FREE

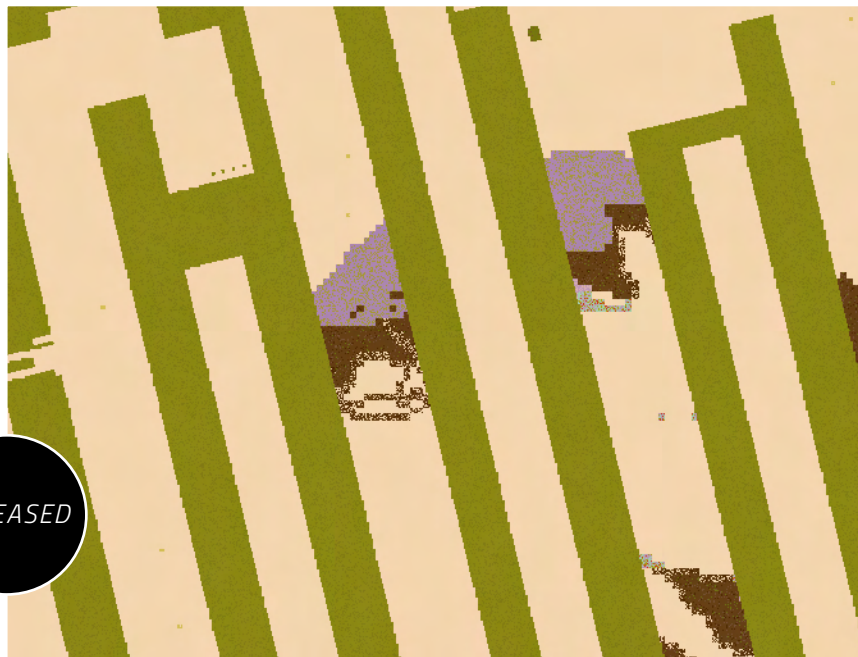
gamejolt.com/games/adventure/bottle-rockets/28448

Free games are often really special experiences. They may be limited in scope, but this usually means they do the thing they are doing really well. Bottle Rockets allocates you a period of time the length of Alberto Balsalm, by Aphex Twin, so use it. Or don't. I don't know. I tried. That's all I can tell you. This song, once with its unhurried meandering, now feels desperate to me.

It's a platformer, of sorts, that rotates hideously. You must progress through doors, sometimes after unlocking them at a console, and deal with variations on artificial gravity. As the player, anyway, it's not challenging. That's not the point. Instead, you should notice how things change, and what people say, to piece together a story. As the designer says, "It is a game to play when you feel sad."

The song is mostly electronic, with unexpected, and lightly disturbing, samples blending with an altered drumbeat. It is measuring time in an unhurried, but

RELEASED



decidedly forward, manner. The pixel art is mostly oranges and pinks in a way that is more carefully organised than you might initially realise. The character's movement is gentle, in a space-like way, sort of.

It's really a very short experience and I don't want to say much more. But, would

you go into space? What would stop you? How long would you stay? What degree of risk might you accept in undertaking a mission? Bottle Rockets seems set only slightly into the future. This is a frontier worth ruminating on, even in a melancholy context.

ACTION PAINTING PRO

MADE FOR IAN MACLARTY
PRICE FREE

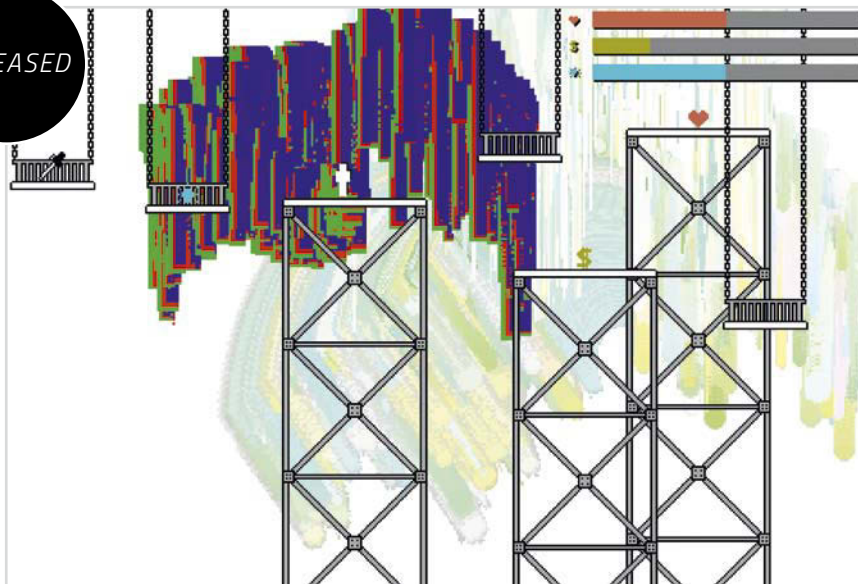
ianmaclarty.com/action-painting-pro

On the heels of Freeplay, and the keynote speech challenging developers to carefully prioritise their reasons for creating art, this colourful platformer constantly forces your creative vision in three divisive directions. This is not to say you can't choose what to paint, just that without inspiration, money and love, it'll be a sparse picture.

It's a basic platformer on one screen, where you grab different artmaking materials and let them colour in your wake. Do you want a crayon, paint, or perhaps some weird digital tool? They appear randomly, but you can choose what to take, or not. Every time you interact with an object, however, the level re-organises. Do you want that paintbrush enough to risk a sudden end to your overall vision?

How so? Well, at the top of the UI, your three needs consistently deplete. If they reach zero, it is game over. So, while you may need more inspiration, and it is sitting

RELEASED



just up there, grabbing something else first will mean this remains unfulfilled. Probably the icon has disappeared entirely. But think, if you simply chart a long, needs-focused path, are you really making art?

Regardless, when you are done, you will be presented with your finished piece. Here

is the sun I drew with a giant pencil. Over there is where the sky melted because I was chasing payment for my damn sun. Down there is the weird, pixel grass that worked out OK on my way to picking up a heart. It's a metaphor that addresses freedom, reality and compromise.

BAD DREAM SERIES

DEVELOPER DESERT FOX SOFTWARE
PRICE CHOOSE YOUR OWN PRICE
desertfox.itch.io/bad-dream-series

■ Do you sleepwalk? I don't. At least, not very often. One night, however, I woke up in my Grandma's old flat, trying to unlock the front door with what was, possibly, my dad's right slipper. I blame falling asleep with the heater on in a small space. It was actually pretty scary, so if you do sleepwalk, you have my sympathies. Bad Dream Series is this exact experience in short, loosely sequential, adventure games, providing confusion and horror through simple line drawings on yellowing paper.

As you're navigating each place, things change in ways that make a kind of sleepy sense. Were there three mutilated people in this waiting room last time I passed by, or four? Next, there may be two, or something entirely different, like a decapitated teddy. Did I cause that change somehow? Yes, I definitely took scissors from a child's picture to cut away vines, but was that octopus always guarding the door, or only after I plucked out my own eyeball with a rusty nail?

There are six episodes currently released, progressively more polished and complex. The first several simply allow you to hover your cursor over items, take them and use them, being prompted for what to use where. It's not so much puzzling as blundering around, trying things and, occasionally, thinking, "Aha, I know what to do with this." Thematically, it makes a lot of sense, because who doesn't dream they're trying to stuff a



■ I woke up in my Grandma's old flat, trying to unlock the front door with what was, possibly, my dad's right slipper ■

toy car into the toaster for some unknowable purpose?

By Bridge, however, there is a discrete inventory and the structure more closely reflects a classic point and click system, in that you have to choose the object for the situation. The music and art is further detailed, too, and you'll see ghostly smudges, shading, flickering patterns and cutscenes. The designer has extended on the original idea while clearly having an overall plan for the series. Gameplay has evolved slowly and in a way that uniquely challenges adventure game structure.

For example, finding severed hands in games is common. How often, however, is that hand your own? The old, "touch everything," approach just became prohibitive, especially if you don't fancy eating your fingers later. Cleverly, many items are referenced in several episodes, rehashing the horror of special moments. In particular, Butcher and its colour-by-numbers task, masterfully plays on ingrained expectations for the genre. Saying more would be to spoil it and I sorely want you to suffer as I suffered.

Having played all of the currently released episodes, I still feel like I have almost no insight into the overarching story. The enigmatic content raises so many questions and answers so few. Although none of the episodes appear to specifically involve the protagonist much at all, you have to wonder about the mind that is creating these dreams. Who am I? Am I disturbed or traumatised? Institutionalised? Why am I this way? Will I ever rest more peacefully? I earnestly hope to find out. **PC**

RELEASED



10 to Watch

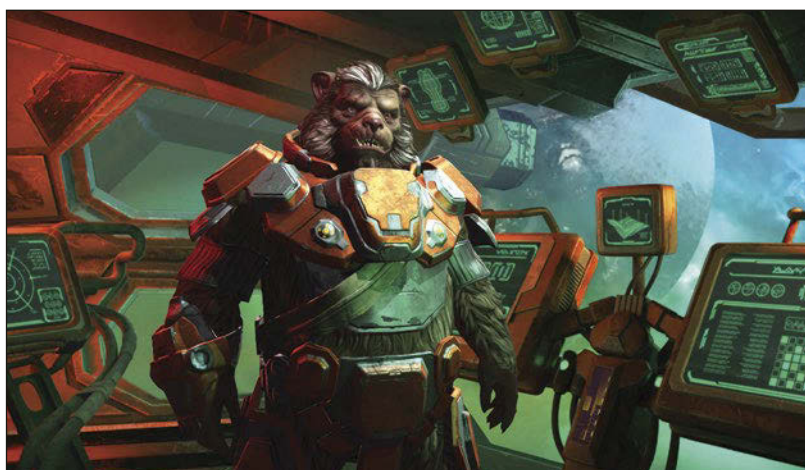
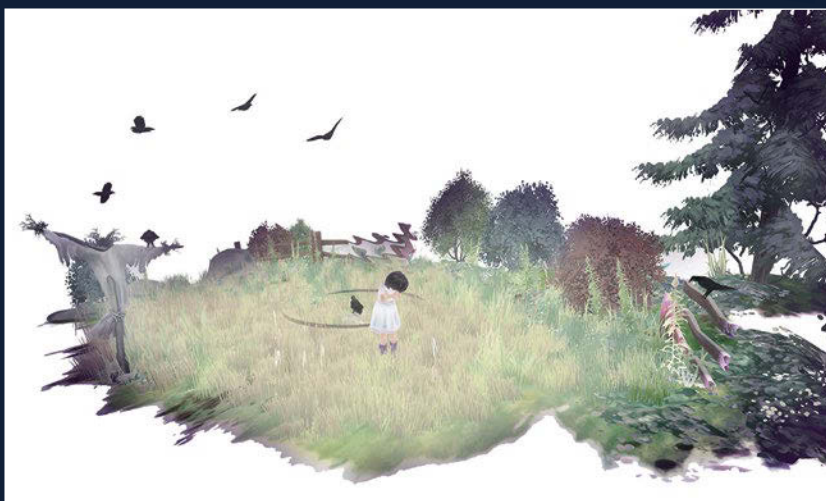
E3
STYLE



BEYOND EYES

DEVELOPER TIGER & SQUID
PUBLISHER TEAM17
DUE 2015
www.beyondeyes-game.com

Rae, is a 10-year-old girl, left her blinded and scarred, physically and emotionally, by a fireworks accident. Stripped of her sight, Rae began to fear the world outside of her comfort zone, avoiding public places and quivering at loud noises. One day, she meets a new friend – a neighborhood cat that comes by to play. The cat is the closest friend Rae has had in years, but when her friend vanishes one day, Rae must find the courage to finally break her isolation and explore more of the world.



MASTER OF ORION

DEVELOPER NGD STUDIOS
PUBLISHER WARGAMING.COM
DUE TBA
masteroforion.eu/en/

So this one came out of nowhere. Arguably the finest galaxy-conquering simulator ever made, Master of Orion is back and looking better than ever after more than a decade long absence. Right off the bat Jacob Beucler, director of global operations at Wargaming, made it clear during our E3 session how much his team and developers NGD Studios love the first two Master of Orion games, and that they all pretend that the third game never happened – a statement that should definitely please diehard fans.

BELOW

DEVELOPER CAPYBARA GAMES
PUBLISHER MICROSOFT STUDIOS
DUE 2015
www.capybaragames.com/below/

Taking inspiration from Spelunky and Diablo, Below is a top-down adventure game featuring randomly generated layouts and permanent deaths. As you'd expect there's crafting to make spells and items like arrows for your bow, but keeping your shield up and attacking at the right time is key to your survival. What we've seen so far looks somewhat like a watercolour painting with even flat surfaces has having some visible texture to them. The music too is appropriately moody helping the already inspired presentation shine.



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CUPHEAD

DEVELOPER STUDIO MDHR
PUBLISHER STUDIO MDHR
DUE 2016
www.cupheadgame.com

Clearly we're not the only ones who love 20s and 30s Disney cartoons because Studio MDHR's spectacular debut Cuphead looks like someone decided to reach inside the PCPP thinking bone and make a game just for us. Presentation-wise the game is flawless - it genuinely feels like an old 30s-era cartoon complete with a big band sound, occasional film grain and voice acted sound effects. Thankfully Cuphead is more than just a pretty face and follows in the recent trend of super-precise platformers with no guesswork needed when it comes to landing jumps or knowing where your shots will hit.



NEED FOR SPEED

DEVELOPER GHOST GAMES
PUBLISHER EA
DUE NOVEMBER 3, 2015
www.needforspeed.com

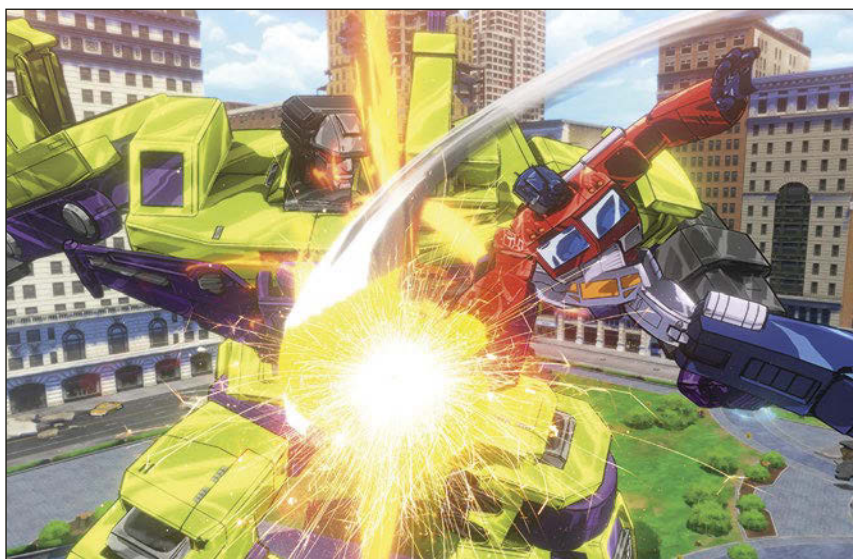
A big push in Need for Speed is the 'Five Ways to Play' that is broken down into Speed, Style, Build, Crew and Outlaw. Speed is what it is - drive fast and don't crash, Style is about precision driving such as drifting or sharp cornering, Build is based off how 'fully sick' your ride looks, Crew is about racing alongside friends at close proximity while Outlaw rewards you for pissing off the cops and not getting caught.



TRANSFORMERS: DEVASTATION

DEVELOPER PLATINUM GAMES
PUBLISHER ACTIVISION
DUE 2015
www.transformersgame.com

Kenji Saito, perhaps best known as the director of Metal Gear Rising: Revengeance, is taking the helm on Devastation, and it showed during our hands on time at E3. Subtle visual clues let you know how your combo is progressing and jumping from enemy to enemy was fluid and made the battles feel dynamic and kinetic. Devastation is the Transformers game fans deserve and has us excited again for a franchise we figured wouldn't get its due until those god-awful movies had ceased to be profitable. Here's hoping a decent Power Rangers game is next on the agenda.



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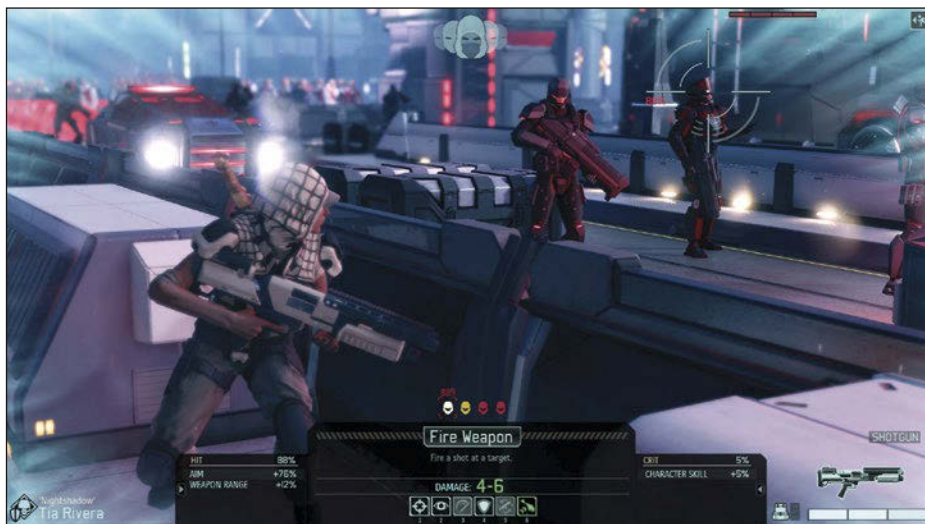
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SUPER DUNGEON BROS

DEVELOPER REACT GAMES
PUBLISHER WIRED PRODUCTIONS
DUE JULY 2015
www.superdungeonbros.com

What do you get when you combine a love of killing monsters, rock-n-roll, and the sort of camaraderie only a four-player co-op can inspire? You get Super Dungeon Bros, an indie bro-op isometric dungeon crawler by Wired Productions that sees four rock themed heroes named Axl, Ozzie, Freddie and Lars thrashing through hordes of the undead in the realm of Rokheim. The dungeons are procedurally generated, so you'll never quite know what to expect: pendulous swinging axes of doom, swarms of Bonie foes, shifting platforms with tricky jumps... that's just a taster of what these dark realms have in store.



XCOM 2

DEVELOPER FIRAXIS GAMES
PUBLISHER 2K GAMES
DUE NOVEMBER 2015
www.xcom.com

"A lot of our players lost the first time they played XCOM, or even the first few times," said Garth DeAngelis, senior producer of XCOM 2. "So we said 'what if in our lore, they failed' and we thought that would lead to an interesting premise." Because the XCOMs are no longer a big budget government operation they've lost their huge underground base. Instead they're airborne, staying mobile and flying around the world in an effort to start a revolution.

ELEX

DEVELOPER PIRANHA BYTES
PUBLISHER NORDIC GAMES
DUE 2016
www.elexgame.com

Currently being developed by Piranha Bytes, creators of one of the great CRPG series, Gothic (ignore Risen), Elex is a new action roleplaying game set in a unique post-apocalyptic science fiction/fantasy world. There is very little information available about the game as yet, but we do know that Piranha Bytes is planning on making a huge, seamless world for players to explore and that Nordic Games has given them almost complete freedom when it comes to the way the game is designed. If the end result is even half as special as Gothic 2 we are in for a treat.

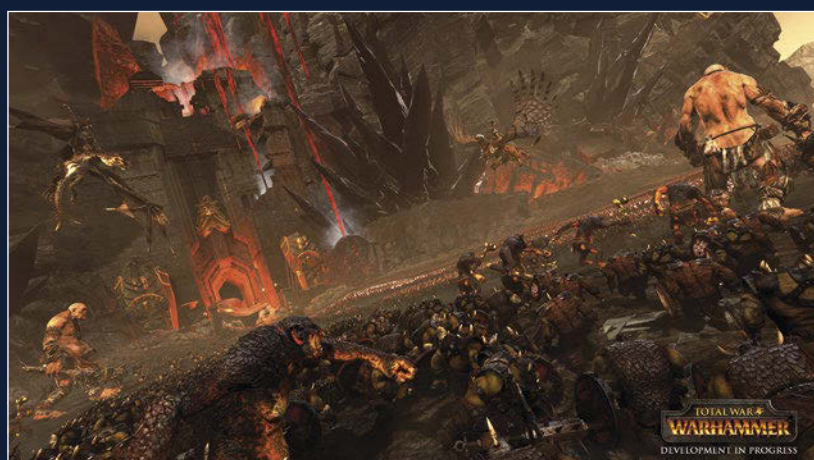


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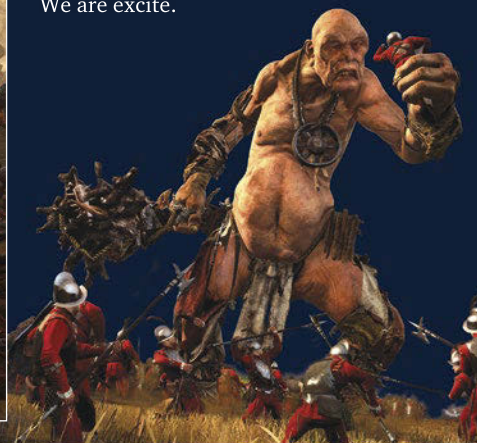
DEVELOPER THE CREATIVE ASSEMBLY

PUBLISHER SEGA

DUE TBA

warhammer.totalwar.com

At one point in our demo, a spell was cast that caused a giant foot came down from the heavens, Monty Python-style, to crush an entire unit. Soon after, Karl Franz, leader of the Empire, mounted on his majestic gryphon, swooped down from the heavens to tear apart a group of ground units. Meanwhile, the greenskins were fighting elsewhere with forest goblin troops mounted atop a giant spider, accompanied by giants that could take down slew of troops with a single attack. We are excite.



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Assassin's Creed: Syndicate

ANDREW WHITEHEAD went to London but sadly forgot to take his grappling hook

DEVELOPER UBISOFT QUEBEC
PUBLISHER UBISOFT
DUE 2015
assassinscreed.ubi.com/

Sequels, remakes and comebacks seem big on the agenda for developers again of late. I mean they always are, but this year feels like there's more than ever. Anyway, Assassin's Creed: Syndicate fulfils two of those categories – it's yet another sequel in the long running series and is hopefully the comeback we've all been waiting for since the less than stellar previous game Assassin's Creed: Unity.

Set in grimy old London in 1868, the Industrial Revolution was in full swing but so too is the world of underground crime. Gangs are thriving in a time when the Assassin Brotherhood is all but a memory and the Templars have finally regained control of the Church and the Monarchy.

Here we find the two stars of the game – twins Jacob and Evie Frye. Leaving their old home behind, these two trained assassins, loyal the to ancient Creed, head to London town to take back power from the Templars while growing their own street gang, The Rooks.

Helping them along the way are notable historical figures like Charles Dickens and Charles Darwin – who as it turns out were more than just academic geniuses but were also apparently big fans of killing people from the shadows. Really though, all I could think is how are they going to manage to shoehorn in Jack the Ripper despite him not being a threat until 1888. Then again historical accuracy is collateral damage in an Assassin's Creed game.

Players can switch between the two protagonists at any time and utilise their individual skills. The main difference that players will notice is Jacob feels like more of a brawler while Evie has more stealth prowess.

This time around, weapons are more modernised to reflect the time period with the brass knuckles, a cane sword, a Nepalese kukri blade and a trusty revolver being your primary tools of engagement. Combat itself is a much faster affair with enemies not waiting around for their turn as much and multiple foes going in for the kill at once.

There's also tonal shift in combat with Syndicate having a more brutal feel to it than any of the previous games. Punches land with a real thud here as your brass knuckles pummel enemies into submission. It's not Mortal Kombat X of course, but it's certainly a visceral step up from other Assassin's Creed games.

A gadget making its debut in Syndicate is the rope-launcher that complements the classic free-running you've been using for years to scale buildings. To use it simply walk up to any wall, press the prompted button and you'll automatically shoot up a grappling hook, attach it to a ledge above and start ascending faster



BEST
OF E3



NO TICKET!



So here's hoping Assassin's Creed: Syndicate can bring this once mighty series back from the doldrums



than you could with your hands and feet alone.

So too can you use the rope-launcher to create long zip-lines between buildings that help you move horizontally across large distances without having to touch the ground or find an alternative path. This becomes increasingly important the more you play as London features some very wide streets and varied building heights meaning the rope-launcher is handy for keeping the game's momentum going.

Another new addition is ground vehicles in the form of the horse and cart. Granted previous games have had rideable horses before, but the

addition of a carriage adds a Victorian-era Grand Theft Auto layer to the game (as if multiple protagonists wasn't enough) as you race down the cobbled streets of London.

During my demo I had to pursue a target who was escaping in their own private carriage. While in pursuit

I was forced to start ramming my enemies out of the way before climbing on to the roof and firing off a few shots from my revolver. I was also told you can leap to other carriages from here, but the chase was getting hectic enough as it was without that added pressure and landing a deadly moving vehicle jump. Plus I felt bad for the horse and didn't want to stress it out anymore.

Another vehicle that I wish I knew more about are the massive steam trains that I did manage to see briefly as I watched Jacob clamour over one while in pursuit of an enemy. There were also a lot of boats floating in the river Thames, but as is often the case with these demos -- details are hard to extract from tight-lipped developers.

Regardless of what we do and don't know if you top and think about the state of the world during this time period it's easy to think of ways Syndicate could be the radical departure the series so desperately needs.

GOING IT ALONE

Since it was first introduced in Assassin's Creed Brotherhood the multiplayer component of the series hasn't been its biggest selling point but always had its fans. But clearly there are not enough of them, so for Assassin's Creed Syndicate all of the development resources are going into the single-player with no multiplayer option being included.

The Assassin's Creed series has been a mixed bag of late. Assassin's Creed III was a bit of a misfire but then Black Flag turned out great while Unity went off the rails again. Maybe it's like the Star Trek films where every other instalment is the one to watch?

But anyway, during my time with the game I did manage to get good feel for how it will play from moment to moment but what will define it is how compelling the long game is. It's how engaging building and maintain a gang on the mean streets of Victorian era is while you're also working on your next big target.

So here's hoping Assassin's Creed: Syndicate can bring this once mighty series back from the doldrums and restore our collective faith in the franchise. I think a lot of gamers are ready to move on and love this series again; all they need is a game they can rally behind. No pressure or anything Ubisoft. **ANDREW WHITEHEAD PC**

Fallout 4

War... war never changes...

DEVELOPER BETHESDA GAME STUDIOS
PUBLISHER BETHESDA SOFTWORKS
DUE NOVEMBER 10
www.fallout4.com

War, as RON PERLMAN, the man whose name can only be spelled in capital letters has frequently told us, never changes. While this may be true, how wars happen and what people do to deal with the consequences does change. *Fallout 4*, the latest game in the acclaimed post-apocalyptic RPG series is the first to show players what the world was like before the war that rendered the Earth a radioactive wasteland. An idyllic suburban happy family with a new child prepares for the day ahead, getting themselves ready in the mirror – an action used to customise either the male or female lead. A man comes to the door to get some details on their Vault Tec account just in case there is a nuclear war. Details given – plotting the chosen character's attributes using the SPECIAL system – life goes on, until the inevitable happens. War. Bombs drop, there's panicked rush to the Vault but it's too late. A bomb drops nearby.

The main character, obviously, survives, but at this point we don't know how. When they appear again it's 200 years later and they look exactly the same as they did when the bombs dropped. Given the fact that the Vaults in previous games have all been based around

scientific or psychological experimentation we're thinking that Vault 111 might revolve around cryogenics or cloning. At any rate, the Vault Dweller emerges from Vault 111 200 years after the global war to find nothing but ruin, mutation, a dog and a still loyal butler robot. There have been no indications as to the narrative of *Fallout 4*, but we're assuming that the mystery of the character's origins and the reason why he's the only survivor of the vault will play a large part of either the story or the impetus for a larger story. What we do know is that the player will eventually make their way to the ruined city of Boston.

Although the developers have been sure to point out that it is an optional activity rather than a mandatory one, players of *Fallout 4* will have the ability to literally reshape the wasteland by scavenging and repurposing materials to build new dwellings, machinery, protection and more as long as you have the blueprints required for the build. Everything works on a modular system, so building can be put together any way the player desired. The bigger and better equipped a town becomes the more NPCs will move in. Some will open shops dealing with rare items, other will offer

services. If you set up two towns you can even start trade caravans running between them to stimulate the economy.

Technology, such as lights, sentry guns and the like and also be built in such a manner but must be linked to a generator for power. Similarly, players will also have the ability to heavily customise their weapons, modifying and swapping parts to create new weapons from old armaments. The gameplay demonstration showed that with the right attachments – a longer barrel, a shoulder stock, sights and a few other attachments a laser pistol could be retrofitted to be a laser rifle. We're definitely looking forward to having a play around with modifying our gear when we finally get some hands on time.

DANIEL WILKS PC

BEST
OF E3



/// Literally reshape the wasteland by scavenging and repurposing materials to build new dwellings ///



For Honor

Let's get medieval

DEVELOPER UBISOFT MONTREAL
PUBLISHER UBISOFT
DUE TBA
forhonor.ubisoft.com

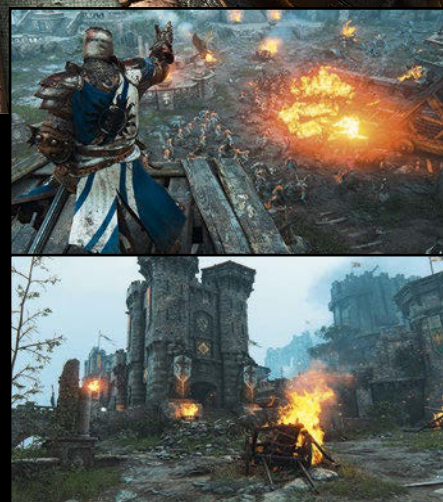
Straddling the line between a third person action game and a MOBA (Multiplayer Online Battle Arena), For Honor features three factions, The Chosen, The Warborn and The Legions – knights, samurai and vikings respectively – battling it out using an innovative melee combat system known as 'Art of Battle'. Here's how it works.

When players confront each other they enter a duelling mode that enables them to change stances and the directionality of attacks or blocks. The left thumbstick is used for movement and the right for positioning the player's weapon either up, to the left or right (no word on how mouse/keyboard control will work as yet). The position of the weapon is key to both blocking and attacking as enemy players can see the directionality of the weapon and attack or defend accordingly. The developers are hoping to inspire real give and take in the battles, with players having to judge whether they will defend or try and take an opportunity to attack an undefended area knowing full well that the opposing player will be looking to do exactly the same thing. In addition to simple attacks and blocks, timing a block right results in a parry, allowing for a

counterattack that can't be defended against.

Each of the factions has multiple character types, only a few of which have been revealed as yet, but even though there are equivalent characters across faction lines, each side plays differently. The Chosen heavy warrior, for instance, is heavily armoured and wields a massive but slow longsword. The Warborn heavy warrior, on the other hand, is more lightly armoured and more capable of dodging and wields a fast, deadly katana. Each of these characters is customisable in multiple ways, with the only caveat being that they will always wield their specific weapon type. In this way, players should be able to know what to expect from any engagement when it comes to tactical choices.

In competitive multiplayer, For Honor only supports up to eight players – four a side – but each team is bolstered by a number of AI soldiers that will help achieve objectives or attack enemy players. These AI characters are easy to kill for players and can be farmed for experience to gain levels, unlocks and perks. By achieving objectives, capturing strategic points and killing enemy players, teams gain points, and once a team gains 1000 points



the opposing team can no longer respawn. Matches end when all the players on one team are permanently killed. Capturing these strategic points from another team takes points from them, so it's possible for a team to rally and come back from the brink.

We have a funny feeling that Ubisoft is angling to enter the televised/streaming eSports field with For Honor. At this stage the game looks beautiful and is as entertaining to watch as it is to play. There is no set release date for the game as yet but you can be sure we'll bring you some in depth hands on in the near future. **DANIEL WILKS PC**

BEST
OF E3



Have at you vile
knave etc. etc.



■ ■ We have a
funny feeling that
Ubisoft is angling to
enter the televised/
streaming eSports
field with For
Honor ■ ■



"Hassan chop!"

Dishonored 2

The mask returns

DEVELOPER ARKANE STUDIOS
PUBLISHER BETHESDA SOFTWORKS
DUE 2016
www.dishonored.com

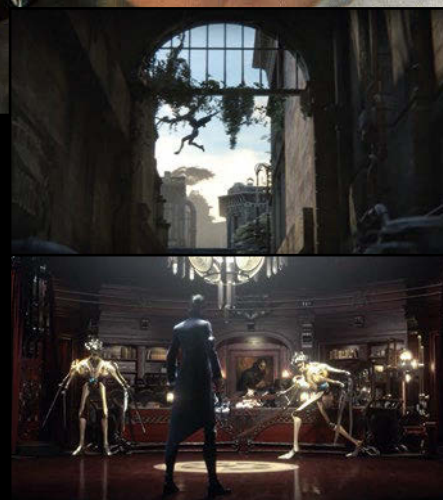


Fifteen years after Corvo Attano was framed for the assassination of the Empress Jessamine Kaldwin and subsequently gifted with supernatural powers to murder his way to justice, the Empire is once again plunged into political disarray and supernatural upheaval when the young Empress Emily Kaldwin is dethroned and is forced to become an outlaw and assassin like her father, Corvo. What could have been another sequel that just presents more of the same is shaping up to be something very special indeed.

By the end of the first game, 10-year-old Emily Kaldwin had been put through the ringer – her mother murdered, kidnapped by a rogue spymaster and eventually taken under the wing of a supernaturally powered assassin. At 25, Emily is not a fragile creature. She is full of grit and rather than falling apart when her world is once again torn asunder she instead walks the path of an assassin to find justice and retribution. After a prologue playing as Emily, setting up the story and the new city of Karnaca, the capital of Serkonos, players will be given a choice whether to continue playing as Emily or swap to Corvo. Rather than being

able to jump between characters throughout the game, players will be locked into this decision, only being able to switch characters on a second playthrough.

Although both characters will have roughly equivalent powers, how they grow with experience and can be modified with the new skill trees will differ greatly. Whereas Corvo retains his Blink ability, allowing him to teleport short distances, Emily instead has a power called Far Reach that acts more like a grapple. Each of these skills is tied to a skill tree that allows the powers to be upgraded in a number of ways – Emily's Far Reach can be modified to drag targets to her for example – that should further differentiate how the characters play. Both characters will have different narrative experiences in the game as well – whilst the mission structure will remain the same as far as we can tell, both Corvo and Emily will receive different information and dialogue, fleshing out different parts of the story. The developers are hoping that the two characters, the different narrative thrusts and the ability to extensively customise powers will provide a good deal of replayability.



Karnaca, like Dunwall before it, is in the grip of an epidemic during the events of Dishonored 2, but rather than rats, the vermin infesting the city are blood flies. These disgusting carrion eaters have a lifecycle that revolves around corpses, using them as food and as a place for laying their eggs. Adult blood flies are harmless, but swarms of adolescent flies can be deadly. The more corpses left in an area, the more chance there is for a swarm. Players will be able to pile corpses to attract blood flies, to harass guards or, inevitably, for an assassination montage that will appear on YouTube. **DANIEL WILKS PC**

BEST
OF E3

Just asking for a
double stealth-kill

Both Corvo and Emily will receive different information and dialogue, fleshing out different parts of the story

Hey look, it's a portrait of our
old mate Anton Sokolov

Just Cause 3

Get ready to blow up all the things. Why? Just 'cause

DEVELOPER AVALANCHE STUDIOS
PUBLISHER SQUARE ENIX
DUE DECEMBER 1, 2015
justcause.com/en-au/

Avalanche Studios knows exactly what kind of game fans of Just Cause want. Whilst the first game tried to have a plot and took itself a little seriously at times, the third instalment of the franchise has embraced the over the top silliness of both the premise and the way people play. There is ample evidence of this ridiculously over the top approach evident in all the footage of the game that has so far been released, but the real kicker is announced loudly and proudly in the trailer. Rather than having to find shops to purchase explosives, dashing super-agent Rico Rodriguez is now equipped with infinite C4. That's right – the weapon that players are always guaranteed to have ammunition for is explosions. That said, from what we've seen so far, everything in the game seems to be made from condensed explosives, so in Rico Rodriguez' world C4 may be the most common compound in existence.

There will be a plot to Just Cause 3, of course – something about Rico returning to Medici, the fictional Mediterranean island of his birth to stop an evil dictator with plans for world domination – but the real aim of the game is for players to have as much fun

as possible doing dumb things with the tools at hand. The grapple and parachute – the two items most synonymous with the series make a return with a few improvements. The grapple can be used to traverse the environment as well as grapple multiple objects together for hilarious Rube Goldberg death machines. The grapple lines can also be tensioned, allowing players to use the grapple to pull apart structures. The parachute has been made a more stable platform, enabling players to shoot whilst falling from the sky with a high degree of accuracy. As the parachute has been transformed into more of a combat platform than a traversal skill, Rico will also be equipped with a wing suit for rapid movement.

The verticality of the game world has been enhanced for the third Just Cause to account for the fact that players will have more ways of getting around than ever before. This verticality is also volumetric, so there will also be caves and underground structures to explore and blow up as well. The missions we've seen so far all seem to be about blowing up structures in interesting or clever achievement oriented ways, so this verticality



Look, mommy! In the sky!
It's Flying Splotion Man!

and the physics of destruction should make for some great online sizzle reels. Players will find and be able to commandeer 80 vehicles in Just Cause 3 and, as the developers had so much fun just spawning in vehicles and equipment during testing, players will also have access to a similar mechanic, being able to have any vehicle or weapon they have unlocked airdropped to them at the touch of a button. We're not sure what the cool down or in game cost of the ability will be as yet, but the devs are clearly aiming to make a stupid action spectacular, so we doubt that there will be too much of a limit to the ability.

DANIEL WILKS PC

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Battleborn

Not a cooperative midwifery sim



DEVELOPER GEARBOX SOFTWARE
PUBLISHER 2K GAMES
DUE LATE 2015/EARLY 2016
battleborn.com

Every Borderlands game has launched at a point in my life during which I couldn't make the time to fit them into my schedule. Within weeks of release my friends are at too high a level to play with, and I end up clearing the first few missions alone – or with one or two random folks online, if I'm lucky – before eventually dropping the game entirely.

Battleborn is a more 'casual' take on the Borderlands formula, a game that feels like it has been designed to fit into busy lives. The RPG elements have been toned way down: the level cap is now 10, your level resets at the start of every mission, and there doesn't seem to be any loot to collect. There are 25 characters to play as, and each one comes with a unique arsenal and special abilities. With each level you choose a new buff, and at level 5 your 'Ultimate Ability' unlocks.

It's all incredibly streamlined, the game leaning on the

differences between its characters more than Borderlands did. I had a chance to play with three of them in my hands-on session. Marquis is a robot in a bowler hat, who is most effective at range with his rifle but can slow down enemies when up-close. Miko is a sentient mushroom person, who attacks with throwing knives and can summon up poisonous clouds of spores. Montana is the big dude with a gatling gun that every game of this type needs, and works much better up close than he does at range (which makes his rushing charge attack extra handy). All of them played differently, with Miko standing out as particularly unique.

The demo involved playing through the same level ('To The Edge of the Void', which felt awfully similar to the opening sections of Borderlands 2) three times with a pleasant bunch of European journo's. I'd like to



begun the Neon Wars have

BEST
OF E3

Miko can actually pull off its own head to heal groups

in truth it became clear very fast that communicating and strategising wasn't necessary

say that by the end we were working together as a well-oiled machine, but in truth it became clear very fast that communicating and strategising wasn't necessary. This demo was ridiculously easy, which had me wondering whether the game scales for multiple players, and why there weren't harsher penalties for death. You basically respawn nearby, a system that works for games like *Borderlands* and *Destiny* because the upcoming loot drops are the real main attraction; stripping those away leaves *Battleborn* feeling a little aimless. With five players you rarely need to do more than target your enemies and press all the attack buttons repeatedly (your special attacks recharge very quickly), and enemies show little reaction to your attacks until they're dead, meaning that the gunplay isn't as satisfying as it could be.

Still, as a casual co-op experience, *Battleborn* could work. The characters all felt genuinely different from each other (one of them, Orendi the war

STAR SAVIOUR

The plot of *Battleborn* is pretty loopy. You're fighting to save the last star in the galaxy from the Varelsi, an alien force who has brought about a catastrophe. The script in the demo was fairly juvenile and silly, which seems to be the tone the game is going for.

witch, attacks with four hands in a way that reminded me of *The Darkness*), and the level-up system means that you can try different strength combinations each time you play. The fundamental mechanics are quite strong, and if *Battleborn* more effectively escalates in the full game, it could scoop up all of us who have difficulty getting invested in *Borderlands*. JAMES O'CONNOR PC

Mirror's Edge Catalyst

Take a leap of Faith

DEVELOPER DICE
PUBLISHER EA
DUE FEB 26, 2016
www.mirrorsedge.com

Eight years after the release of *Mirror's Edge*, players will once again have the chance to step into the shoes of parkour runner extraordinaire, Faith Connors. Parkour is fairly ubiquitous in games, but what makes the *Mirror's Edge* games stand out from the pack is the fact that they are played from a first person perspective, so every jump, slide, swing, wall-run and roll becomes an immersive, vertiginous thrill.

A prequel to the original game, *Mirror's Edge: Catalyst* delves into Faith's backstory and expands the city, eschewing the linear levels of the first game for a semi-open world rife with the potential for exploration. Runner vision is still present in the game (the mechanic that highlights the objects that can be climbed, mantled, jumped on and what have you), but the nature of the open world has changed the implementation. Rather than highlighting everything in the area, the runner vision will instead only highlight what's important in any given mission or the best possible route to any waypoint the player sets on the map. As a prequel, *Catalyst* will also explain what this runner vision is. We don't have all the details as yet, but it has to

do with some kind of eye implant or overlay given to Faith by her mentor. As an open world, players should also expect the city to be full of collectibles to discover and collect. Collectibles aren't that interesting a feature, but the fact that players will have to discover ways to navigate the city to find them should make for a thoroughly enjoyable experience.

The combat mechanics, far and away the worst thing about the original game, have been completely overhauled – Faith will no longer be capable of picking up and using guns so must rely on two different types of melee attacks to defeat enemies – momentum attacks that allow her to disable an enemy whilst maintaining her momentum, and transference attacks that transfer her momentum to an enemy, knocking them through windows, off roofs or into other enemies. The combat mission we played on the show floor was fairly simple and easy to beat in the 13 minutes we were given for hands on time, but we're sure that combat will become progressively more difficult as the game goes on. From our experience with both the combat and the game in general, keeping up speed and momentum seem



to be the order of the day. While running, Faith is essentially immune to gunfire, so quickly taking out enemies and moving on to the next, staying constantly in motion looks to be key to winning any engagement. Similarly, speed and momentum are key to most parkour movements – without sufficient momentum wall running, mantling, swinging and the like aren't possible. Key to keeping up this momentum is timing jumps and rolls so there is no break in the flow of movement. We can't wait to tear across rooftops when the game comes out early next year. **DANIEL WILKS PC**

BEST
OF E3



/// The combat mechanics, far and away the worst thing about the original game, have been completely overhauled ///



The character design has a very Ghost in the Shellish vibe

Ghost Recon: Wildlands

At E3 2015, we discover why you should be afraid of ghosts

DEVELOPER UBISOFT PARIS
PUBLISHER UBISOFT
DUE TBA
ghostrecon.ubi.com

I'll admit I was pretty shocked when I first saw Ghost Recon Wildlands and had concerns that somebody had put an action game into my tactical shooter. But after watching a live play through of one long mission it's clear now that Wildlands is still a tactical game at heart, it's just got a few more fun ways to deal with situations when the shit hits the fan.

My demonstration was a hands off one in a dark room where I watched four players explore a sizable chunk of the South American republic of Bolivia. The variety of the terrain was immediately apparent and we were assured this is Ubisoft's biggest open world game ever. Dry salt plains, snowy mountains, lush jungles and sparsely populated towns – graphically the game looks great and it's clear that creating interesting worlds is still Ubisoft's biggest strength.

The demo began with the four Ghosts heading to a meeting point however they could, including speeding across the desert in a four-wheel drive and riding a dirt bike down the side of a mountain. Later in the demo the four players gathered together in a little town where they could show off how alive the world

is with both enemies and regular civilians going about their daily lives.

Sometime later the Ghosts team had managed to break into an enemy compound and steal a helicopter that they could use for their primary mission of extracting an informant from an enemy base. Two players stayed in the chopper as the other two parachuted down and snuck in to secure the target. Making their escape in a sedan they came under heavy gunfire and relied on their flying allies to provide covering fire.

Dealing with the changing situations was a definite highlight of the game. Early in their mission all four players adopted a stealthy approach and used distractions and long range attacks to confuse their enemy. Later as their mission turned to hell they relied on their full arsenal and each other to survive and complete the objective. I have no doubt that expert players could execute a flawless stealth mission, but there's also room for an all-action approach, if that's your bag.

All that said there's no getting around it, there's Ghost Recon in the title and with that name comes expectations. I've always enjoyed the series but I'm far from a purist so



Not pictured: the Predator, watching, waiting...

to me Wildlands looks like a solid game that I'm excited to check out. But if it's a highly technical shooter you're after you may be best to switch to ARMA III.

At the end of the day I can see where Ubisoft were coming from – they either innovate and breathe new life into Ghost Recon or they let it die on the vine. And to be fair their other shooter, Rainbow Six Siege, will satisfy your tactical action hunger.

So it's probably wise to take Ghost Recon Wildlands for what it is – a great looking open-world military shooter that has the potential to be both an unpredictable action movie and thoughtful stealth shooter all at once.

ANDREW WHITEHEAD **PC**

BEST
OF E3

South Park: The Fractured But Whole

Come on down to South Park and have yourselves a time

DEVELOPER UBISOFT SAN FRANCISCO
PUBLISHER UBISOFT
DUE TBA

www.ubisoft.com/en-US/game/south-park-fractured-but-whole/

The game with arguably the best name of any game announced this or any year at E3, not simply because of the puntastic subtitle but because that name actually sounds like the subtitle for a modern (Transformers: Rise of the Fallen, we're looking at you) movie whilst simultaneously detailing the superpower of the main character, South Park: The Fractured But Whole continues the adventures of New Kid in the quiet mountain town of South Park.

The Stick of Truth set a benchmark for games based on existing movie or TV IPs, managing to make a 30 hour RPG feel like an episode of the show and by the looks of it we should expect the same from the sequel. The announcement trailer, in a nice piece of meta commentary, points out the weakness of the combat system in the original game (a bugbear for many, though we quite liked it), so it will be interesting to see what new mechanics the new developer, Ubisoft San Francisco, has in store.

Rather than continuing the fantasy LARP the kids were playing in the first game, much like every other form of entertainment known to man, South Park: The Fractured But Whole instead sets its sights on superheroism, with

the boys and New Kid teaming up to take down Professor Chaos General Disarray and a host of other villains. No details have been released as yet as to New Kid's superhero alter ego, but considering that Matt Stone and Trey Parker hinted that like all superhero movies, The Fractured But Whole will include an awkwardly kludged in origin story, his powers will invariably revolve around his preternaturally powerful sphincter and the story will reveal how it came to be such a force of gaseous nature.

With Butters taking the role of the villain, the best and most useful companion from the first game will no longer be available, but we're assuming the roles will be filled by the characters from the South Park episodes Coon & Friends, Coon 2: Hindsight, Mysterion Rises and Coon vs. Coon & Friends. From the trailer it's obvious Cartman will of course take the role of his off-colour Wolverine/Batman style character, The Coon, Stan Marsh will return as the hero with a psychic link to all tools, Toolshed, Kenny will be the enigmatic Mysterion and Kyle will be his flying, laser eyed alter-ego, The Human Kite. Many other characters are seen throughout the reveal trailer, including Timmy as Iron



Maiden, Token Black as Tupperware, Bradley Biggle (actually the alien Gok'zarah) as the actually superpowered cereal mascot themed Mint-Berry Crunch, and Clyde Donovan as the pretty much useless and not particularly steadfast Mosquito. We're not sure if they will be full team members for New Kid, but considering they were all part of the original roster of the Coon & Friends superhero team chances seem pretty good.

There is no set release date or window for The Fractured But Whole as yet, but as The Stick of Truth was continuously delayed due to script reworks and tweaking, not getting anyone's hopes up too early can only be a good thing. **DANIEL WILKS PC**

DOOM

You are huge! That means
you have huge guts!

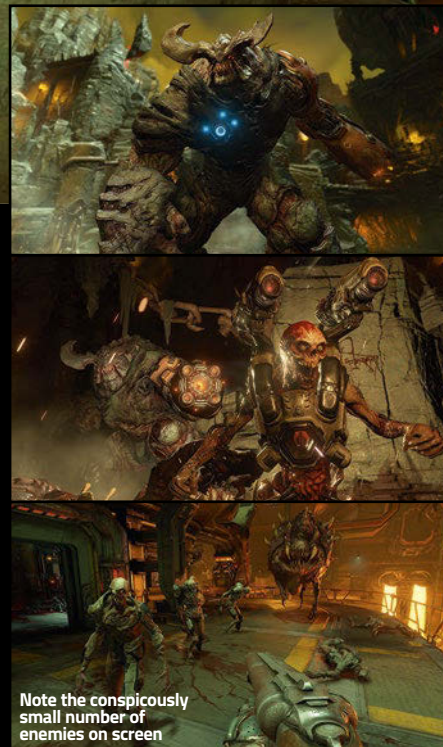
DEVELOPER ID SOFTWARE
PUBLISHER BETHESDA SOFTWORKS
DUE 2016
www.doom.com

Although the initial reaction to the Doom announcement and footage shown at E3 was positive, sentiment has cooled a little in the weeks following the event, and, looking at the state of the franchise in recent years, the trepidation many Doom fans feel is certainly justified.

Doom 3 was a beautiful game when it was released in 2004. It was leagues beyond anything else on the market when it came to looks, but to achieve the visuals id Software had to make some rather fundamental changes to the way the game played. Rather than the long, mazelike corridors and wide arenas populated by huge hordes of demonic monsters that made up the first two Doom games, Doom 3 was instead made up on a series of small rooms (designed so that the engine didn't have to render too much in the way of distant geometry) and only a handful of monsters at a time. Then Doom 4 was announced in 2008 but cancelled for, at the time, non-specific reasons. In a recent interview with Polygon, Pete Hines said that Doom 4 played too much like military shooters of the day and felt divorced from the actual Doom franchise.

The newly unveiled Doom looks much more

like old fashioned Doom, with the mazelike corridors being obvious from the first few moments of the gameplay reveal, but, at least to our eyes the game still seems to be a bit divorced from what fans really know as Doom. Many old favourite weapons return, including the double barrelled (Super) shotgun, the plasma gun and chainsaw, but the combat didn't come across as being as frenetic as the original Doom. Part of this comes from the fact that during the gameplay demo many encounters were with single demons and even when it gets busy no more than five or six beasts appear on screen at any one time. A lot of emphasis was also placed on the new execution moves that the Doom Trooper is capable of pulling off when in melee range of a demon. We don't know how these attacks will be triggered as yet but they seem to be gory instagibs capable of killing most monsters. We have our fingers crossed that the reason for only having a few monsters on screen at any time at this stage of development comes down to the fact that the engine is still being optimised and the gameplay demo was rolled out for E3 and isn't truly indicative of the final game. With Quakecon coming up (on



Note the conspicuously
small number of
enemies on screen

the same day this issue hit stands as a matter of fact) we will hopefully see much more of the game in coming weeks and with luck our worries about Doom will be placated.

In a FPS marketplace dominated by tactical or military shooters, having an old-school run and gun game that puts the focus on speed and hordes of enemies will come as a real breath of fresh air. **DANIEL WILKS PC**

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Games²⁴²

YOUR GUIDE TO PC GAMES



By the time you read this, hopefully Arkham Knight will be closer to being playable on PC. Many folks are having no issues with the game, but many more are finding it to be one of the buggiest releases of recent years, thanks to a rather sub-par effort to port the game to PC.

On console, the game's great - on PC... well, Warner pulled it from shelves quicksmart, which is a pretty sure sign the company's taking the game's bugs very seriously. But how did it happen?

It would be nice to assume that Rocksteady wasn't aware of just how bad the game was, but the company knew, and didn't want to risk pushing the PC release back. In hindsight, it probably should have; Warner and Rocksteady certainly knew enough to change the PC specs a day before release, and admit that the game was not great on AMD-flavoured video cards.

The trouble goes back further, really, as Rocksteady had handed over porting duties to a 12-person company, which seems like a rather optimistic proposition. It's simple too big a game.

And, now, Warner's paying the price for rushing.

There is an upside though. Bennett really loves the game, and even now admits it's getting a lot better. But there's more baby steps to come.

David Hollingworth
Digital Editor

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POWERED BY



SCORING SYSTEM | PCPP scores its games on a 1 to 10 scale. The higher, the better – though 10 is by no means a “perfect” game. We’re not convinced such a thing exists, so consider a 10 a masterpiece of PC gaming, despite its inevitable flaws. A 5 is a decidedly average game; one that doesn’t excel in any particular area, without being an affront to our senses – the ultimate in mediocrity. Below this, you’ll start to find the games our reviewers suffered an aneurysm getting through; above it, the titles truly worth your time and money. And remember: a score is only a vague indication of quality. Always read the full review for the definitive opinion!

WE
PLAY
ON:



Batman Arkham Knight

It's a marvellous night for a Bat-Dance

DEVELOPER ROCKSTEADY
PUBLISHER WARNER BROS.
PRICE \$69.95
AVAILABLE AT STEAM (PROBABLY), RETAIL
www.batmanarkhamknight.com

As the final Batman game from series' creator RockSteady, Arkham Knight should have been a glorious swansong to all that made this the greatest superhero game series ever created. And on many counts it succeeds, with a laser-tight focus on the strengths of combat and exploration that made the first two games so successful. Sadly the PC version has more bugs than a filthy Gotham city alleyway, crippled by performance issues, crashes and all-round weird behaviour. Games like Arkham Knight remind us why PC gaming can be such a fickle mistress, but if you're able to get past its myriad issues there's a satisfying conclusion to the Bat's adventures hidden beneath its many technical woes.

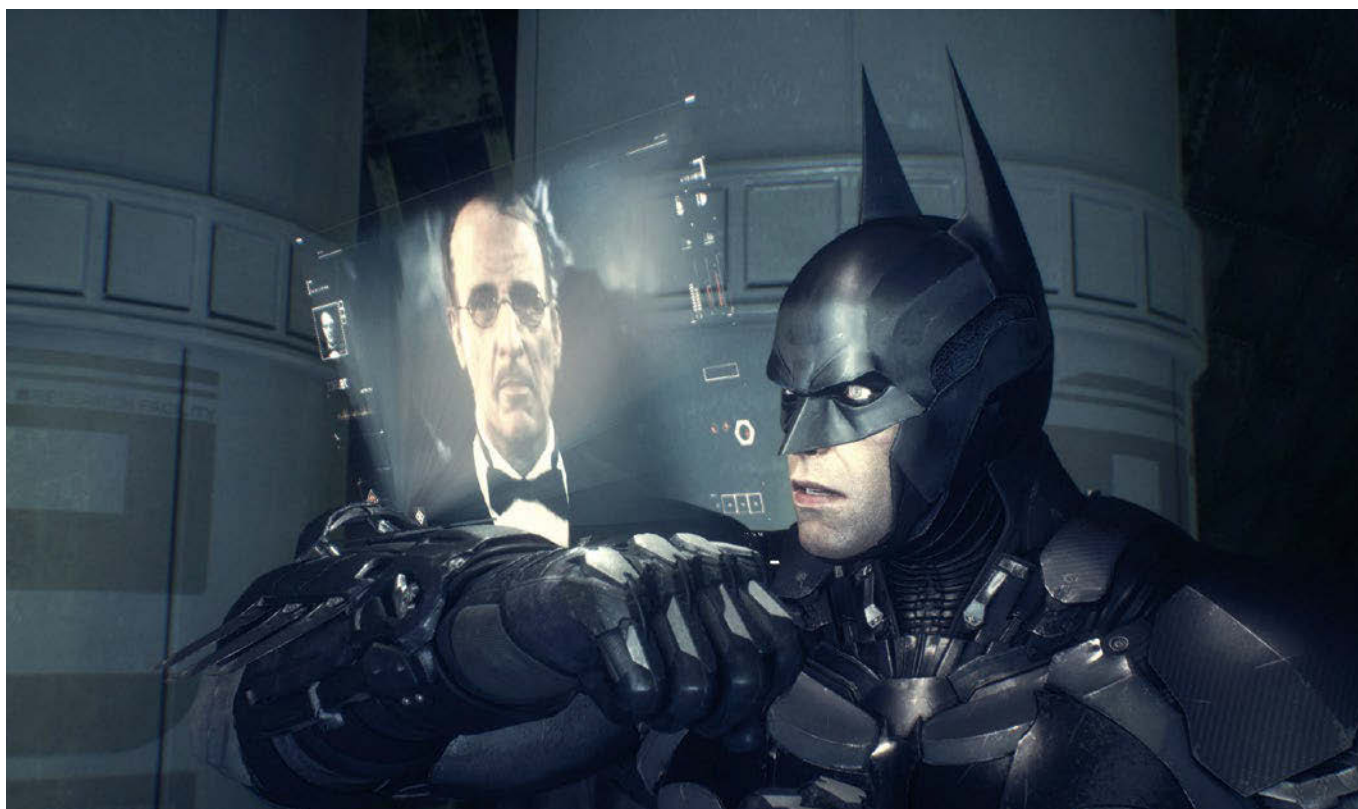
You know things are really bad when a publisher pulls a game from Steam due to customer complaints, which is exactly what happened to Arkham Knight within a week of launch. With Rocksteady reported to be having major issues getting the console version of the game to simply work, the PC port was

shipped off to Iron Galaxy Studios, who also helped out on Batman: Arkham Origins, another game that had a less-than-stellar launch. The resulting mess was a game that crashed frequently, had broken graphics effects such as missing rain textures and required a supercomputer to maintain the sluggish 30fps lock that the game shipped with.

Thankfully Rocksteady quickly released a patch in the following week that fixed many of the crashing issues, but performance is still slower than a bat swimming through cold porridge several weeks later. I ran the game on an i7-4790K with twin GTX 780 Ti graphics cards, and could only get smooth performance by disabling SLI and devoting one of my GPUs to handle PhysX. By smooth performance I mean 30fps; editing the game's config file to unleash a 60fps limit resulted in horrible stutters and unplayable performance, especially when driving the Batmobile, the newest addition to the series and an integral part of the new game. WB and Rocksteady are promising to get the game up to scratch

via patches, but until then we'd advise staying away from Arkham Knight unless you've got some seriously fast hardware.

Speaking of the Batmobile, based on feedback I've heard from other players, Batman's pimped out ride inspires love in some drivers, while others loathe it. I'm firmly in the former camp, and don't mind that Rocksteady has made this matte black steamroller such a central part of the game. It's the injection of originality that Arkham Knight needed to help it remain fresh after I'd spent 70 hours mastering its hand-to-hand combat in the first two games. The Batmobile comes into play in three major ways. Most common are battles with armoured drones, where the Tank mode allows it to blast these tracked terrors into tomorrow. High-speed chases and Riddler races use the car's default mode, where the afterburner and powerslide buttons will be put to good use, and the amount of destruction you'll wreak on Gotham's streets is an impressive display of PhysX at work. Finally, the car's power

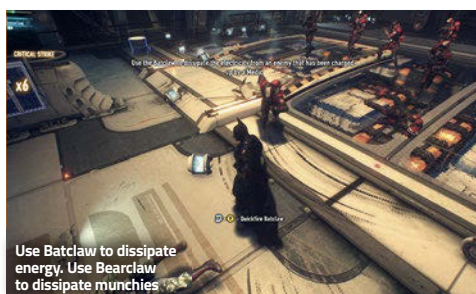


winch does much of the heavy lifting in the many puzzle sections throughout the game. Flying around Gotham remains the fastest way of traversing its many streets, especially now that the grappling gun has been given extra boosts via unlocks, ping the Bat high into orbit over the city below.

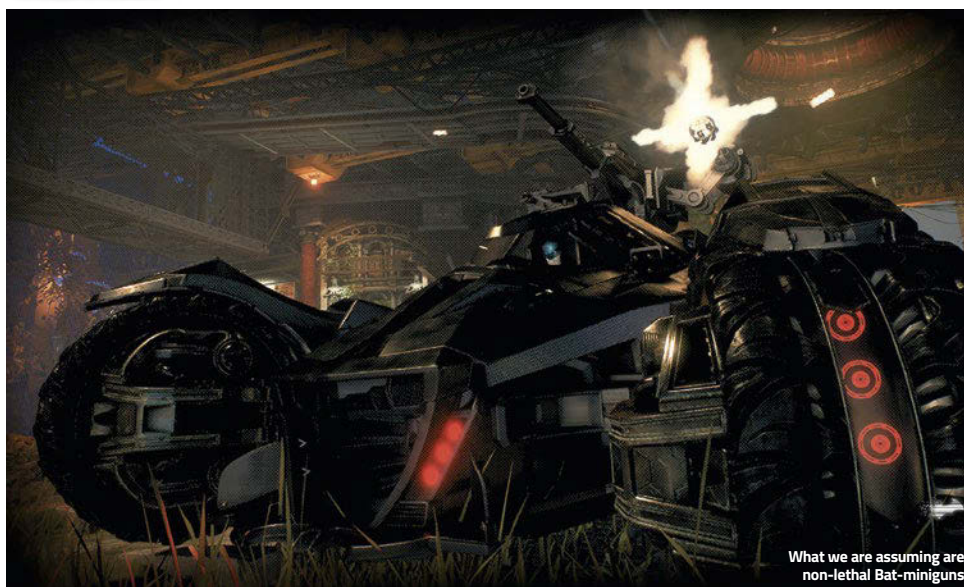
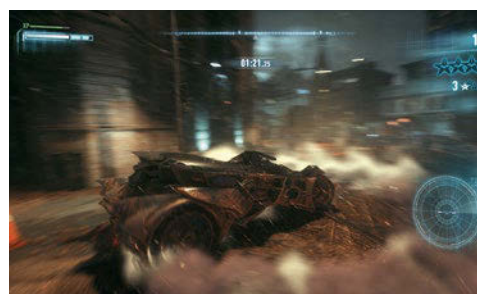
And what a city it is. Rocksteady has really gone to town when building Gotham this time around, and it's apparently five times larger than the previous version. Yet every square metre feels hand-crafted, making the simple act of poking around, looking for new stuff, just as enjoyable as sticking to the main mission. Not once did I get the impression that an area was tacked together out of existing assets by the work experience kid, and each of the city's three islands has its own unique atmosphere. Perhaps it's the sheer size and detail of the city that is the root cause of the performance issues; when you're sitting high atop Wayne tower overlooking the sprawling metropolis below, heavily populated with thugs, drones and vehicles, it's impossible not to be impressed that it runs at all. Even the dense urban centres of GTAV look positively sparse compared to the intricate concrete labyrinth that is Gotham.

Rocksteady has given players plenty of reasons to explore the city, with around a dozen different types of side quests. From following blazing fires to find Firefly, to storming heavily armed watchtowers, to tracking a serial killer via strung-up corpses that dot the city, there's always an icon on the map nearby to draw you away from the main storyline. At times it does feel like there's almost too many side quests, yet they're all infinitely more enjoyable than the filler that puffs out the Assassin's Creed games. They're also crucial for unlocking the massively expanded repertoire of moves and gadgets that Batman has on offer.

Most of the Bat's abilities from the last game are unlocked at the beginning of Arkham Knight, yet it's possible to unlock around 100 new moves,



Use Batclaw to dissipate energy. Use Bearclaw to dissipate munchies

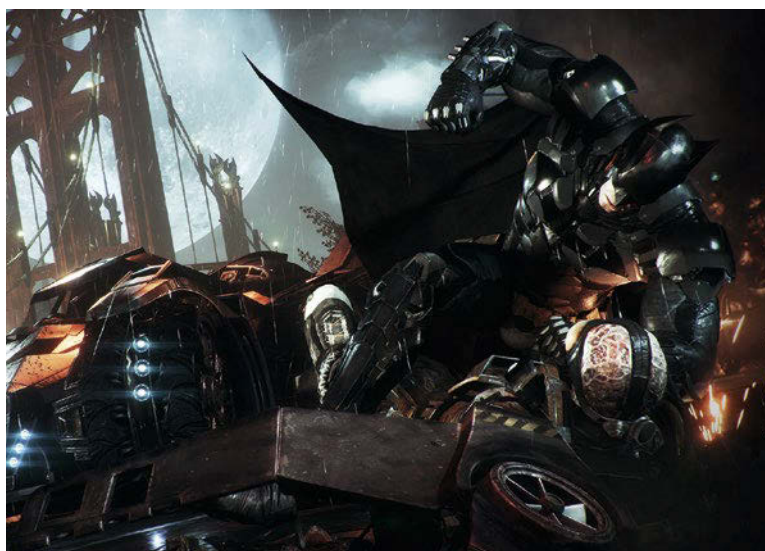


What we are assuming are non-lethal Bat-miniguns

Most of the Bat's abilities from the last game are unlocked at the beginning of Arkham Knight

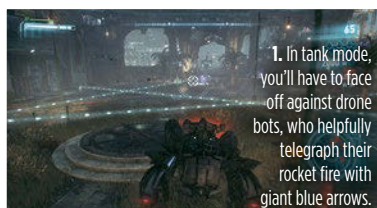
WHY SHOULD I CARE?

- + You are the Batman
- + You need an excuse to upgrade
- + You can't get enough of Mark Hamill as the Joker
- + You like waiting for patches

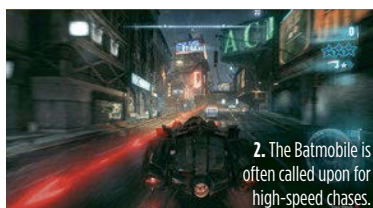


SEQUENCE

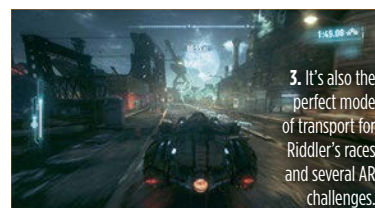
CHICKS DIG THE CAR



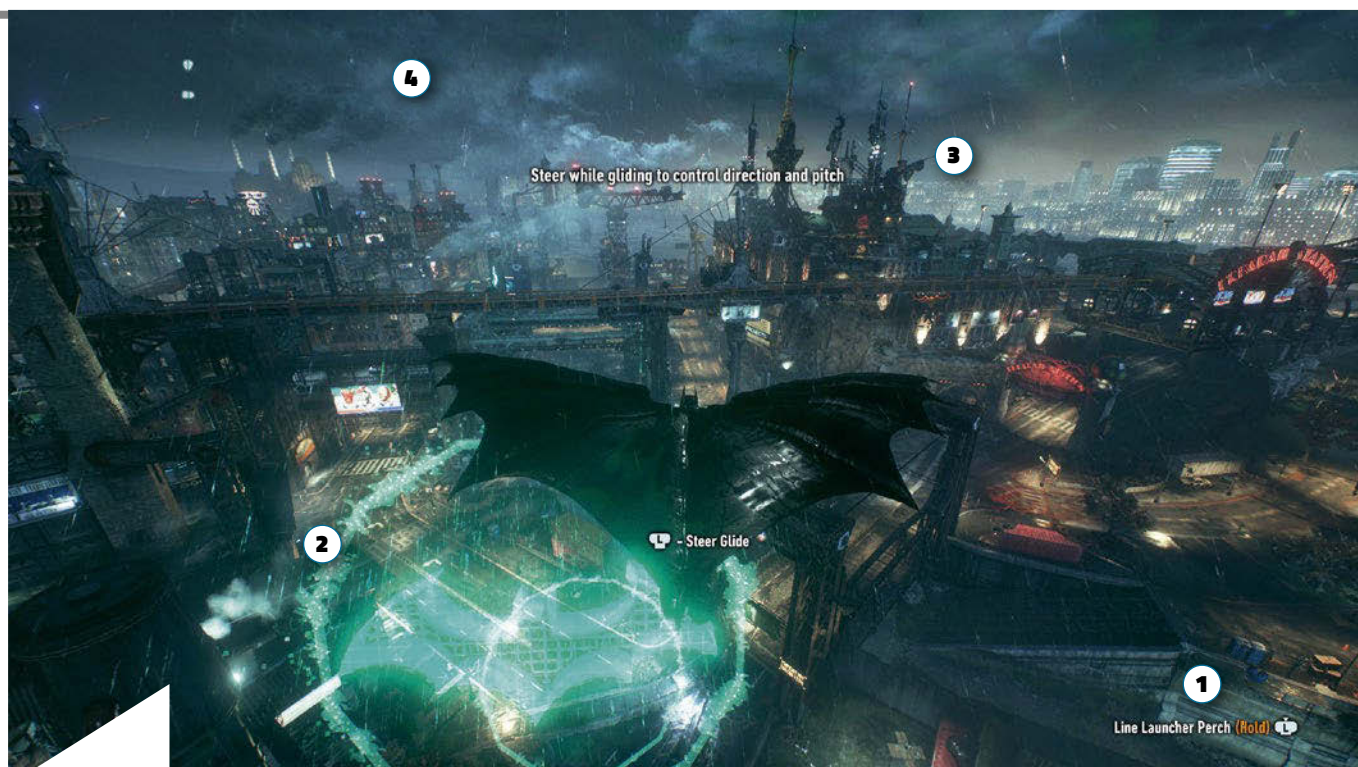
1. In tank mode, you'll have to face off against drone bots, who helpfully telegraph their rocket fire with giant blue arrows.



2. The Batmobile is often called upon for high-speed chases.



3. It's also the perfect mode of transport for Riddler's races and several AR challenges.



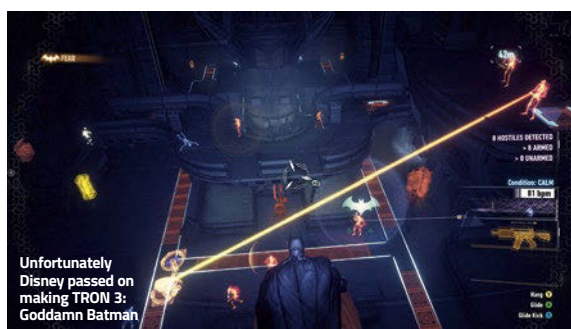
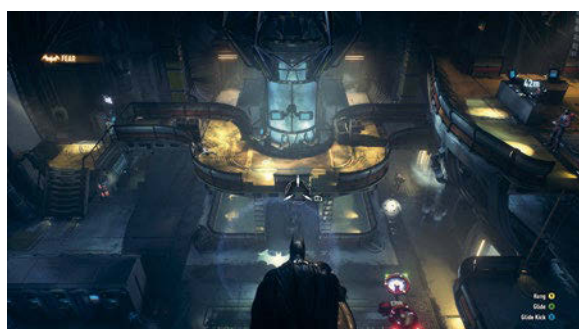
I'M THE GODDAMN BATMAN

1. Contextual on-screen prompts luckily remind you of the myriad of moves you've got in reserve.

2. Here I'm partaking in the new Grapple Gun AR challenge, and have to navigate through these virtual hoops.

3. The city is unbelievably vast and intricately detailed – Gotham truly is a work of art.

4. It's always raining in Gotham City, especially now that Rocksteady patched the broken rain effects.



Unfortunately Disney passed on making TRON 3: Goddamn Batman

gadgets and technology improvements. In fact, the sheer variety of button combinations becomes a little unwieldy in the last half of the game, requiring the intellect of the Riddler to recall each and every move. I constantly found myself going back into the abilities tree to refresh my memory, yet still barely managed to touch half of my advanced skills in the heat of combat. Perhaps it's due to the new tricks found in Batman's utility belt, but I also found the combat to be a lot less challenging than past Batman games. I've always played the series on the hardest difficulty, and have fond memories of taking an hour or more to beat particularly hard sections in previous games, yet I rarely lost an encounter in Arkham Knight.

This is despite the inclusion of a handful of new baddies. Medics can heal unconscious thugs, as well as charging their suits to deliver a shocking surprise if the Bat tries to kick an electrified opponent. Ninjas like to leap off the nearest wall to deliver a Katana-combo, while Brutes shrug off your blows with ease, requiring a quick cape-slap to the face before becoming vulnerable. It would have been nice to see even more new targets for my fists of fury, but at least the existing enemies are now blessed with even better AI, sticking together during the Predator sections and using new gadgets to counter the Bat-tech.

In terms of sheer size and scope, Arkham Knight is easily the most

impressive game of the series. It's got the biggest city, the most side missions, and an almost overwhelming number of gadgets and moves. The introduction of the Batmobile helps to spice things up, provided you're a fan of its vehicle-centric gameplay, which hardcore fans might feel doesn't gel with the Dark Knight's usual M.O. If only it wasn't such a horrible mess when it comes to performance and bugs, it'd be the satisfying conclusion that we all anticipated. Hopefully Rocksteady will come good on its promise to patch the hell out of the PC version, but until then Arkham Knight has been relegated to the poor-PC-port corner, playable only by those with ludicrously fast gaming PCs. **BENNETT RING PC**

OR TRY THIS:



BATMAN ARKHAM CITY ROCKSTEADY 2011

- ▲ Still the best Batman game for PC players
- ▼ You've probably already beat it. Twice



MAD MAX AVALANCHE STUDIOS 2015

- ▲ Batman's combat, Mad Max's vehicles
- ▼ You'll need to wait a couple of months for it to come out



INFAMOUS: SECOND SON SUCKER PUNCH 2014

- ▲ The only other good superhero game
- ▼ It's only on PS4

VERDICT:

Crippled by performance issues and bugs, there's an incredible game waiting to emerge if Rocksteady can remedy the Bat's woes with patches.

7

Galactic Civilizations III

Explore, expand, elucidate peaceful intentions... and then exterminate with extreme prejudice!

DEVELOPER STARDOCK
PUBLISHER STARDOCK
PRICE \$49.99
AVAILABLE AT STEAM, RETAIL
www.galciv3.com

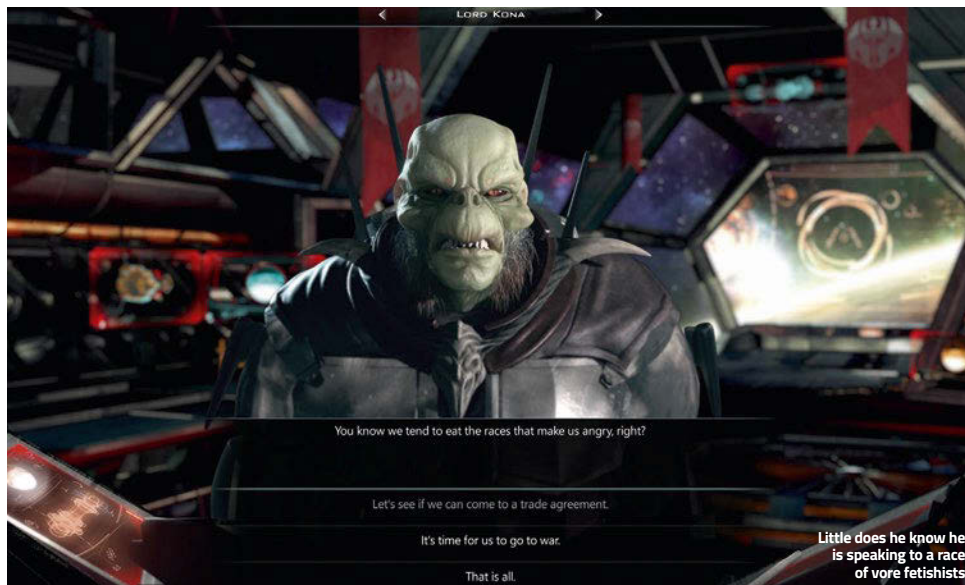
At first appearance Galactic Civilizations III isn't the prettiest child. Its large, almost goofy interface shouts at you like a Fisher-Price toy sale, and the sometimes the layered info screens aren't the most intuitive. But like books, looks can be deceiving.

As I learnt the core mechanics of planet development, understood the difference between exploring and surveying, and dove in for my first scuffle in combat, it just felt something was missing. But I kept on playing and then, the next time I checked the clock, the sun was rising. Ooohk... so it must be doing something right. Where'd my time go?

It went where it always goes when you're preoccupied - in that pursuance of just one more tech... one more starbase on the borders of my frienemy... one more diplomatic negotiation and one more big fleet battle. Just. One. More. Turn. And then I'll stop! Alas, GalCiv III had other ideas.

So let's look at what it does right: there's enough micro management to put you in control, but not too much to become a bore. Planets have limited zones you can build on providing productive, economic, or research collateral along with a wide range of unique buildings. Adjacency bonuses mean you still have to strategise your planet layout if you want to maximise its output, and this is a great feature.

Planets also feed production to shipyards, and multiple planets can 'sponsor' a shipyard so you can channel productive capacity to build your fleets. Starbases are the other side of the equation, providing access to unique resources (such as Durantium, Thulium and Anti-matter) mined in



■ I kept on playing and then, the next time I checked the clock, the sun was rising ■

WHY SHOULD I CARE?

+ You have an aversion to sleep and a predilection for universal domination

+ You love a bit of diplomacy interspersed between pew pew! ship battles

+ Malevolent Benevolent Monthly is no longer publishing, scratch your itch here

space that allow you to build special weapons and buildings. They also extend your range of influence, but are vulnerable unless protected.

Exploration is rewarded with resources or artifacts that can convey quite tasty bonuses, and along with the unique resources means they can become hotspots of contention.

But the fun really starts when you meet other races. A decent diplomacy engine provides all the wanted features from trade and open borders to convincing someone to attack another player. Cocky AI may demand you appease it, while empires you could clearly trounce will do their best to placate you with you gifts. And you don't necessarily have to commit galactic

genocide to win the game, you can go for a diplomatic victory or converting most of the galaxy to your culture.

This ties into influence, where you let your borders do the talking. Given enough propaganda, weak-willed enemy colonies near a border can 'flip' allegiance to your side. Or, alternatively, there's always the good old route of winning by just beating the crap out of everyone else.

New in GalCiv III is the addition of Ideologies -- Benevolent, Pragmatic and Malevolent. Each has five trees of progression that can impart some potent abilities. You earn ideology points for certain actions, usually when colonising a world and being presented with a dilemma to test your scruples.

SEQUENCE

XXXX RATED ACTION!





SPACE IS THE PLACE

1. Every sector has an influence rating, keep an eye on this near borders.

2. Planets! Build nice things here, no bountiful farms and slave factories.

3. Shipyards produce ships, and multiple planets can support a shipyard.

4. Starbases are used to mine unique resources, and defend your zone.

5. Handy summary panes detail the select item.

6. Unique resources, and how many you can use to construct ships and buildings.

This is all complimented with another gameplay mechanic -- the United Planets council. During the expansion phase, most races are on good terms and the council has to decide various galactic-wide issues. Sometimes you may be out-voted. The solution, of course, is to become chair of the council, if you're popular enough, and then choose which issues are presented. In later stages, when you feel the council is a hindrance to your maniacal plans, you can give them all the middle finger and secede.

Along with quite expansive research trees per race, there are unique ship styles for each faction (though they do all tend to look a bit samey), and plenty of juicy tables and graphs to pour over.

It does miss the mark on a few things. Ship design is wonderfully flexible but frustratingly obfuscated. What should be an enjoyable aspect of the game quickly becomes a chore -- after making a few ships I found myself just bypassing it and rocking with stock designs.

While ship combat *tries* to look impressive, it's relatively hollow, and is marred by horrible camera controls that are essentially broken.

It's also frustrating to determine exactly what modifiers you have and where. Your race has its own modifiers, so do planets and ships from various modules or buildings, but there's no one place to get a complete overview.

A single player campaign helps you learn the ropes but the real fun is in

setting up a sandbox or in multi-player. Whatever you do, set aside a large chunk of time: a four-player game on the smallest 'Tiny' map size takes around 15 hours, and there are nine galaxy sizes up to 'Insane', with the ability to sport up to 128 opponents if you really *are* insane.

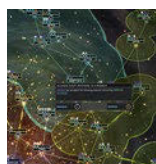
One of the biggest complaints levelled against GalCiv III has been that it's essentially GalCiv II with better graphics and some modest tweaks. And while this is true, it's not necessarily a bad thing. The experience of GalCiv III is a careful refinement of what makes 4X so additive to play in the first place. If your inner galactic tyrant needs release, GalCiv III will satiate. **ASHTON MILLS PC**

OR TRY THIS:



SINS OF A SOLAR EMPIRE: REBELLION STARDOCK 2012

- ▲ Fast gameplay and tactical combat
- ▼ May not appeal to all



ENDLESS SPACE AMPLITUDE 2012

- ▲ Nails the empire building engine
- ▼ Less than stellar combat



SWORD OF THE STARS KERBEROS 2008

- ▲ Gets absolutely everything right
- ▼ Start to show its age

VERDICT:

It's not perfect, but it's a worthy successor to the now 20-year franchise.

7

Hatred

I write dark poetry on black paper

DEVELOPER DESTRUCTIVE CREATIONS
PUBLISHER DESTRUCTIVE CREATIONS
PRICE \$19.99 USD
AVAILABLE AT STEAM
www.destructivecreations.pl

Credit where credit's due, Hatred is a masterpiece. Not as a game, mind you, the game itself is a derivative, dull, poorly executed, nihilistic and boring twin stick shooter that doesn't even manage to capture an ounce of the shock value of Postal, a game released 18 years prior. What Destructive Creations deserves credit for is the way they marketed the game. The developers played both the media and the audience like a harp, finding a niche to exploit and the rumbling undercurrent of dissatisfaction within a certain group of gamers who believe that everything in gaming is going to hell (or maybe more precisely, heaven) in a handbasket because of political correctness.

This same niche wedged the media, playing on all of the bugbears that are perceived by both sides of the whole GamerGate debacle, as what's wrong with modern gaming, ensuring that each side of the debate – and I use that term advisedly – would fuel the other side. Every negative article would cause the game's supporters to up their actions and rhetoric, leading to more negative articles and so on... Destructive Creations created a perfect storm for their release, guaranteeing that no matter if there game turned out to be bad – and it definitely is – the gamers the title was aimed squarely at would be all but honour bound to defend it to the death, and any negative review would be seen as the “corrupt” gaming media trying to shout down a developer that didn't conform to their “Social Justice Warrior” standpoint. If only half as much effort and creativity had gone into the game.

Players take the role of a stereotypical



■ The biggest problem with Hatred isn't that it goes too far, it is that it doesn't go far enough ■

WHY SHOULD I CARE?

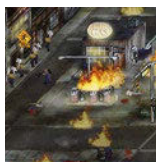
- + You really shouldn't
- + You wish Robotron was a nihilistic goth stereotype
- + Free speech or something

looking greasy haired, trenchcoat clad homicidal git and proceed through a number of grey-brown levels shooting people, most of whom are defenceless and then dealing with the cops, army and other armed types who show up to defend the helpless. That's about it. Wounding a target or kicking someone to the ground gives the player the opportunity to perform an execution. This is the only way to regain health, so in pretty much every encounter, especially in the later stages of the game in which there are more armed opponents, combat devolves to the same pattern of killing as many targets as possible then running away to find an unarmed civilian to execute to regain health before heading back into

the fray again. It's tired, boring and repetitive. The various guns you pick up aren't interesting, the opponents are so cookie cutter that it appears there are only a handful of skins, the AI is woeful, the controls are mishandled to such an extent that they are unsatisfying on keyboard and mouse AND gamepad.

Beside the technical issues, of which there are many, the biggest problem with Hatred isn't that it goes too far, it is that it doesn't go far enough. If you're aiming to shock, don't simply trot out the same thing Running With Scissors did nearly 20 years ago. Give me blood and death and gore and outrageous, confronting violence. Don't give me monochrome Robotron starring a douchebag. **DANIEL WILKS PC**

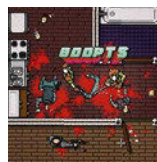
OR TRY THIS:



**POSTAL
RUNNING WITH SCISSORS**
1997
▲ Hatred done better
▼ Still terrible



SMASH TV
PROBE ENTERTAINMENT
1990
▲ Bloody, satirical twin stick shooting
▼ Hasn't been rebooted



**HOTLINE MIAMI 2:
WRONG NUMBER**
DENNATON GAMES
2015
▲ Bloody, controversial, amazing.
▼ Not available in Australia.

VERDICT:

Not offensive enough to cause outcry, not good enough to warrant paying attention to.

3

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P-SERIES

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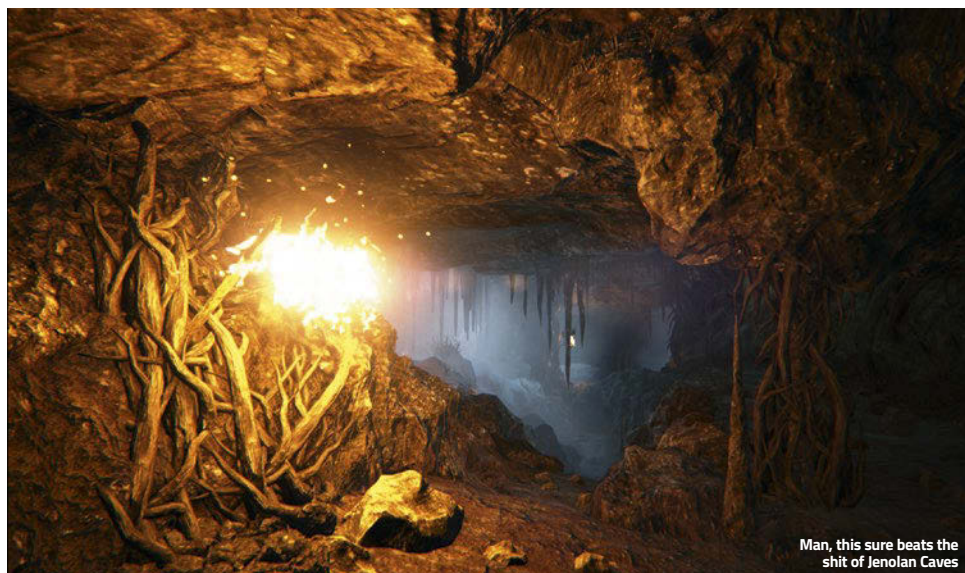
Kholat

Not directed by Renny Harlin

DEVELOPER IMGN.PRO
PUBLISHER IMGN.PRO
PRICE \$19.99 USD
AVAILABLE AT STEAM
kholat.com

The Dyatlov Pass incident is one of the great unsolved mysteries of the last century. 10 hikers went to the northern Ural Mountains in February 1959 and all but one died under extremely mysterious circumstances on the eastern side of Kholat Syakhl. The investigation into the deaths discovered that the hikers had cut their way out of their tents and fled the campsite. Some of them were barefoot and none had any protective gear on. Two of the hikers had fractured skulls and crushed ribs though there was no sign of a struggle and there were no contusions on the bodies. One was missing its tongue and eyes. It was, and remains, rather creepy to say the least.

You have to admire a game with the confidence to drop players into a world with little idea of what to do. Immediately invoking the feeling of being lost, Kholat sees the player, an investigator voiced by Sean Bean, wandering around the Ural mountains, investigating sites related to the incident, collecting journal pages and trying to piece together the mystery. There is a definite element of Slender at work in Kholat. The scares come from the situation and environment rather than the occasional shadowy threats that menace the player. Overall it's a rather unnerving experience, effortlessly conveying the feeling of being lost, in over your head in a situation beyond your understanding and the existential threat said situation carries with it. In a purely thematic sense, Kholat is a triumph. Unfortunately on a playability level the game leaves a little something to be desired.



Man, this sure beats the shit of Jenolan Caves

the game goes from being frustratingly abstruse to easy enough to finish in one or two sittings

WHY SHOULD I CARE?

+ You want to see something in which Sean Bean doesn't die

+ You find creeping solitude sexy

+ You always wanted a throne of bones

Kholat is a rather gorgeous game, with some incredible and memorable locations ranging from a throne of bones to a charred forest to a strangely terrifying tree, but a good deal of the game looks confusingly similar. Snowy forest paths, strangely enough, look very similar, making it all too easy to get lost entailing a good deal of backtracking and aimless wandering. Whilst this does evoke that aforementioned feeling of getting lost, it's not actually particularly fun to play out. Much of this confusion comes from the fact that the player is given no real direction, but once you work out how to effectively use the compass and map the game goes from being frustratingly abstruse to being easy enough to finish

in one or two sittings. The occasional setpieces that see the player having to find a journal page before the ephemeral enemies can close in break up the snowy vistas but come too few and far between to be much more than a jump scare gimmick.

At its best, Kholat is truly chilling. Some of the journal pages are dull, but many of the superbly voice acted excerpts are genuinely unsettling, detailing horrors both real and existential. As a narrative experience, Kholat is, for the most part, a deeply satisfying and thoroughly unnerving experience. Unfortunately there isn't enough depth to the gameplay to make it a hugely compelling one.

DANIEL WILKS PC

OR TRY THIS:



SLENDER: THE EIGHT PAGES
PARSEC PRODUCTIONS
2012

- ▲ Hunt for journal pages in a creepy forest
- ▼ Hunt for journal pages in a creepy forest



SCRATCHES
NUCLEOSYS
2007

- ▲ Creepy haunted house adventure
- ▼ Terrible original ending



AMNESIA: THE DARK DESCENT
FRICTIONAL GAMES
2010

- ▲ Incredibly frightening otherworldly chase
- ▼ Exhausting

VERDICT:

A great narrative experience but rather dull from a gameplay standpoint

7

Heroes of the Storm

We can be heroes, just for one game

DEVELOPER BLIZZARD
PUBLISHER BLIZZARD
PRICE FREE-TO-PLAY
AVAILABLE AT BATTLE.NET
us.battle.net/heroes

Heroes of the Storm is a true example of what Blizzard as a developer is best at – taking a popular gaming style or concept, picking and choosing the best parts, streamlining the interface or mechanics and offering a level of accessibility not seen in other games of the type. Warcraft, StarCraft, World of Warcraft, Diablo and Hearthstone all fall into this development philosophy, each refining, if not redefining their respective genres thanks to the mixture of cherry-picked features and accessibility. Now Heroes of the Storm joins this rather illustrious group of games, as it brings the same ease of play and accessibility to the MOBA.

There are no items to be picked up and equipped in Heroes of the Storm, and this is a godsend when it comes to learning characters, as it removes a layer of meta game that can serve as a definite impediment for any new players of DOTA II, League of Legends or any of the myriad other established MOBAs. Any items that may be vital in other MOBAs – potions for example – have been replaced by in game interactive objects. Healing wells replace potions, ensuring that players can get back to the fray as soon as possible. Although the theorycrafting of builds and laneing tactics are still a major part of HotS, Blizzard has put the focus purely on getting people straight into combat and giving them tense, give and take battles.

Every player in a team is made to feel equal, thanks to a group XP system. Instead of one or two veteran players with knowledge of the best lane farming techniques rocketing up in levels, every player in a team receives



When the final bell tolls
franchises shall go to war!

Every player in a team is made to feel equal, thanks to a group XP system

WHY SHOULD I CARE?

- + You want to know who would win in a fight between The Lost Vikings and Diablo
- + You've been afraid to try other MOBAs
- + You prefer the term Hero Brawler

equal XP, ensuring that every member of a team is capable of operating at the same level of power, even if they don't have equal levels of skill. At certain levels players get to choose between pairs of abilities for their hero. Initially these choices aren't make or break, but after only a fairly short while playing the game and reaching the highest player level possible, every skill choice is unlocked making for some great theorycrafting.

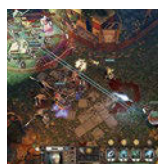
One of the smartest things Blizzard has done with Heroes of the Storm is allow each hero to fulfil more than one goal, all but ensuring a player can fill a role on a team no matter the character they choose to play. Healers can be specced for damage, DPS warriors

can be specced for tanking and so on. Hopefully this will take down another barrier that has traditionally stood in the way of people trying to get into MOBAs – finding a team in which they can fill a niche and won't be given tremendous amounts of shit for their choice of hero.

The accessibility of HotS and lack of an item meta will probably keep many veteran MOBA players away, but there's no doubt that the game will and deserves to attract a whole new audience who have previously found the cost of entry – multiple levels of theorycrafting and meta knowledge and an often unwelcoming gaming environment – too high to tolerate.

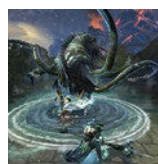
DANIEL WILKS **PC**

OR TRY THIS:



BLOODSPORT.TV
FATSHARK
2015

- ▲ Fun co-op gladiatorial arena combat
- ▼ Gets repetitive



SMITE
HI-REZ STUDIOS
2014

- ▲ Fast paced 3D MOBA action
- ▼ Steep knowledge curve



INFINITE CRISIS
TURBINE, INC
2015

- ▲ DC comics characters in a MOBA
- ▼ Dwindling player base

VERDICT:

An excellent introduction to the world of MOBAs for anyone put off by the learning curve or community of other games

9

Ronin

"Hint: This is not a stealth game. Just kill everyone".

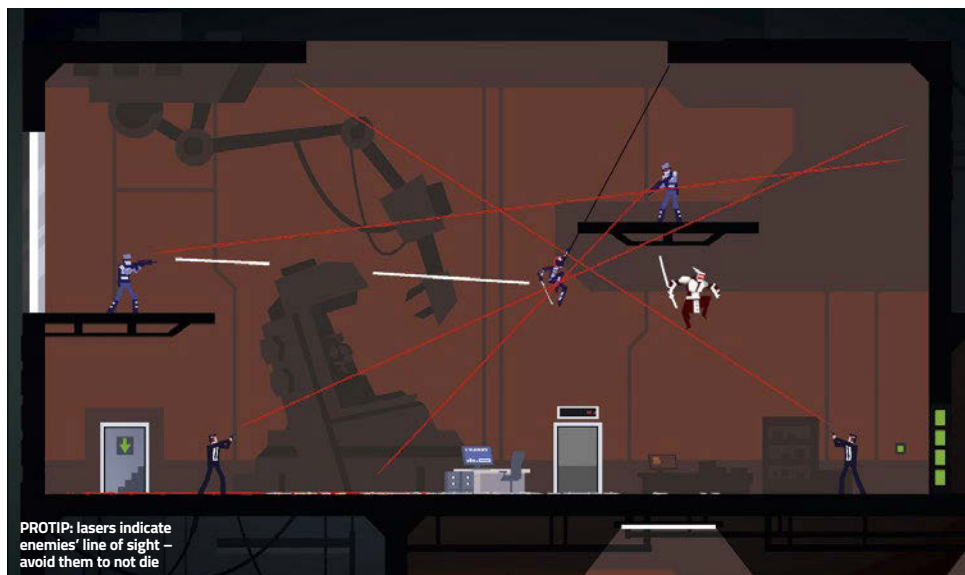
DEVELOPER TOMASZ WACLAWEK
PUBLISHER DEVOLVER DIGITAL
PRICE \$12.99
AVAILABLE AT STEAM, GOG
www.devolverdigital.com/games/view/ronin

Proving that Polish videogames need to be known for more than The Witcher, Ronin is a solid, if short, game, with stylish turn-based combat, a strong soundtrack and art design, and some stealth elements which require more brains than the typical sidescroller needs.

Ronin puts players in the boots of a motorcycle suit and helmet wearing assassin out for revenge. There's little else to the story, aside from some perfunctory information on the targets, though given Ronin's short length and gameplay, this isn't an issue.

Ronin is far from a stealth game; level design makes stealth a limited option, with enemy placement designed to provoke open combat. As soon as players are spotted, a musical cue rings, a sound which in later levels becomes heart-racing. Being spotted, whether by civilians or combatants, often leads to one of them calling in troops to lockdown the area. Lockdown makes it difficult to move around by shutting doors and closing off much of the map, and it also fails one of the optional objectives each mission has – no lockdowns, spare civilians, kill all enemies – which need be fulfilled to earn points used to unlock new moves.

When in combat, movement is limited to jumping and using the grappling hook to swing. Jumping into enemies, or closing in to kill them with a sword swipe raises the level of the combo meter. Depending on its level, the meter lets players use various upgrades, like throwing shuriken to disrupt enemies' aim, which is indicated by the red laser trails marking their line of sight. These trails heavily ratchet up the tension;



PROTIP: lasers indicate enemies' line of sight – avoid them to not die

It feels like the legendary fight from Oldboy, only repeated every mission

WHY SHOULD I CARE?

+ Turn-based combat meshes well with this strategic slice-n-dice game.

+ Combat encounters are tense and require thought

+ Soundtrack compliments the entire affair

+ An excellent time-killer

with every turn, players need to dodge enemies' aim, which often makes it a game of cat-and-mouse as you try to survive, until you can use your abilities to pick them off one by one, while trying not to be turned into Swiss-cheese. Given the narrow corridors and tight rooms that comprise many of the game's environments, it feels like the legendary fight from Oldboy, only repeated every mission.

While Ronin has 15 missions, they are highly repetitious, and if not for differences in level design and enemy placement, they would be identical. Each target has several preliminary missions assigned to them which involve sneaking into compounds to find intel on a target's location. The repeated

use of this formula, coupled with poor use of checkpoints, and constant hints which can't be turned off, makes Ronin feel unfinished. More variety in mission types, additional targets, and more story would have worked to give the game a greater sense of substance; though fun and engrossing, Ronin can be completed in a day. Its new-game plus does nothing to help, offering no additional upgrades. Nor do the ending variants mean much, considering that the story feels like an afterthought.

On the whole, Ronin's shortcomings are few. While the game should be longer, its strengths in its soundtrack, art style, and combat, make for a fine game that is well worth playing.

ALESSANDRO GUARRERA **PC**

OR TRY THIS:



GUNPOINT

SUSPICIOUS DEVELOPMENTS
2013
▲ 2D game that's part-stealth, part-level editor
▼ Not enough gameplay



ARMED WITH WINGS 2

SUN STUDIOS
2008
▲ An action-packed stylistic sidescroller
▼ Poor weapon balancing



NINJA GAIDEN

TECMO
1988
▲ Detailed sprites and excellent gameplay
▼ Hugely difficult, with items difficult to see

VERDICT:

Ronin's turn-based combat is a breath of fresh air. A solid game in spite of its brevity.

8

Devil May Cry 4: Special Edition

The devil's in the details

DEVELOPER CAPCOM
PUBLISHER CAPCOM
PRICE \$24.99 USD
AVAILABLE AT STEAM
www.capcom.co.jp/devil4se/

In a day and age when it seems like every second game being released is a reboot of a classic game, it's kind of refreshing to see the release of a special, remastered edition of a fairly recent game. Initially released seven years ago, DMC4 took the already absurd action series to further absurd heights with constant, frenetic combat, massive unforgiving bosses and a protagonist that veered wildly in personality from nihilistic angel of fury to goofy teenager yet could always remain hilariously unimpressed by demons, no matter how large or deadly.

Devil May Cry 4 Special Edition is a pretty spectacular game. The well optimised engine can deliver crisp 1080p, 60 frame per second silliness on moderate hardware and rarely show a dip in performance no matter how many enemies clutter the screen, and believe us, there will be a lot of enemies on screen, especially during later levels. Technically the game is a triumph, but seven years on from the initial release the weaknesses of the original design are rather glaring. The demon-armed, emo git hero, Nero fights his way through combat arena after combat arena in flashy but ultimately kind of hollow style, stopping every now and then to pick up and experiment with a new weapon, solve a simple puzzle or interact with one of the over-the-top NPCs. Then you do it again. More combat arenas, more simple puzzles, more silly conversations. Once you're done with Nero, it's time to do the same thing all over again with original Devil May Cry hero Dante.

As spectacular as the combat looks it's more fatiguing than engrossing.



seven years on from the initial release the weaknesses of the original design are rather glaring

WHY SHOULD I CARE?

+ You want to party like it's 2007

+ You like small arenas and repetition

+ You like to fiddle while Rome burns

Things are constantly happening on screen in an explosion of colours and... explosions, but the lustre of the spectacle wears off fairly quickly. The spectacle of 2008 feels dated. That said, there is some fun to be had experimenting with the combat styles of the three new characters added to the Special Edition - Lady, Trish and Vergil. Lady is especially interesting because unlike all the other characters she focuses on ranged attacks as her primary way of taking out demons, rather than the melee approach of the others. Luckily these characters are available from the beginning because unless you're a hardcore fan of DMC you probably won't want to play through again. There is a Bloody

Palace mode in which players can test their combat skills - a series of combat arenas with progressively harder enemies - but given that the bulk of the game is almost the same thing with a few puzzles thrown in it has little overall appeal.

Devil May Cry 4 Special Edition is a fairly lengthy game, but at heart it feels hollow. Spectacle makes up for depth in story and combat and repetitious combat arenas replace any interesting level design, even before you start to backtrack through areas you've already explored with another character. It looks great and runs smoothly, but underneath the glitz and glamour there is very little substance to sink your teeth into. **DANIEL WILKS PC**

OR TRY THIS:



BATMAN: ARKHAM ASYLUM
ROCKSTEADY STUDIOS
2009

▲ Incredible level design and combat
▼ Not enough Scarecrow



SHADOW OF MORDOR
MONOLITH PRODUCTIONS
2014

▲ Incredible level design and combat
▼ Not Batman



ONI
BUNGIE
2001

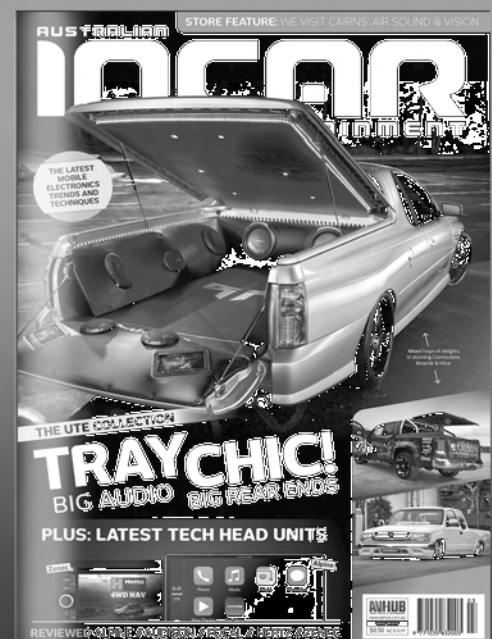
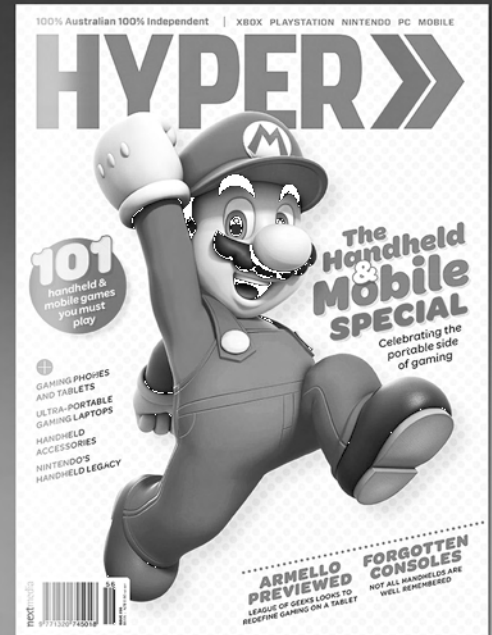
▲ Incredible combat and character design
▼ No sequel

VERDICT:

A fun distraction but lacks enough depth to keep your attention for too long

6

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GEFORCE GTX 980 Ti G1 GAMING



GV-N98TG1 GAMING-6GD

- New WINDFORCE 3X Design
- Intuitive Fan Indicator
- Multi-color Illuminated LED
- Stylish Back Plate



Welcome ASUS STRIX Radeon 300-series

Welcome the new range of ASUS STRIX Radeon 300-series graphics cards, featuring the established AMD Graphics Core Next (GCN) microarchitecture. Backed by the proven ASUS STRIX feature set, including OdB Fan Technology delivering quiet gaming like never before, the new range of STRIX Radeon 300-series graphics cards deliver strong pixel pushing power!

The new range of STRIX Radeon graphics cards covers the whole Radeon 300-series range from the STRIX R7 360 through to the STRIX R9 390X starring the new DirectCU III heatsink solution, the successor to the renowned DirectCU II. The new range also implements new manufacturing technology in the form of Auto-Extreme Technology.

But what is the new DirectCU III heatsink solution and Auto-Extreme Technology all about? Read on to learn more!

Introducing Auto-Extreme Technology

Auto-Extreme Technology brings premium aerospace-grade quality and reliability to the new STRIX Radeon 300-series graphics card range. At the heart of Auto-Extreme Technology is the ability to surface mount components with an automated manufacturing process.

The benefits of Auto-Extreme Technology are numerous and include even further improved quality control with machine based optical and laser component installation scanning, significantly reducing potential for faults. Additionally, the new process is a flux-free production method, resulting

in no oxidation on the PCB or component connectors. By removing flux from the manufacturing process, this also reduces electricity consumption during production by 50% - half!

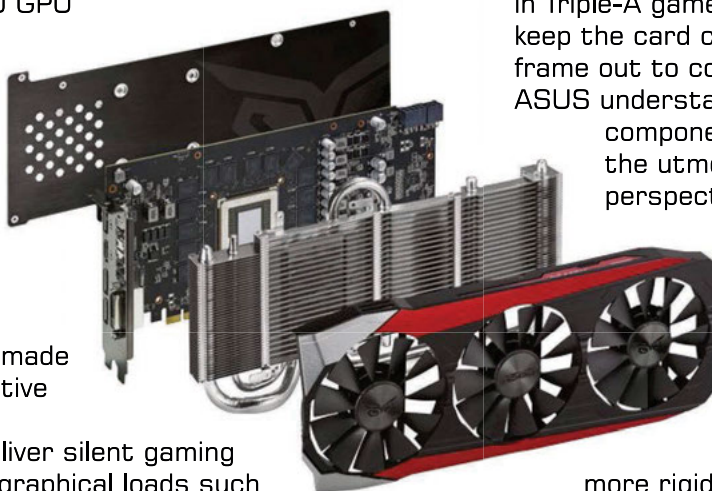
For those that enjoy holding their new graphics card before installing into their system, you'll be happy to know that due to the Auto-Extreme Technology, the rear of the graphics card is now smooth and absent of any protruding component connectors. But don't go slapping your friend across the face with it. That'll still hurt.



Stay Cool with DirectCU III

The STRIX R9 390X delivers the next generation of DirectCU GPU cooling technology in the form of the DirectCU III heatsink solution. DirectCU III is a further evolution of the renowned DirectCU II cooler.

Delivering OdB Fan Technology for silent operation below 65°C, made possible by highly effective 10mm heatpipes, the STRIX R9 390X can deliver silent gaming capability under lower graphical loads such as those found in popular MOBAs such as League of Legends and DOTA 2.



When pushing high graphical loads, such as found in Triple-A game titles, the three 90mm fans keep the card cool and ready to push the next frame out to continue your gaming adventure. ASUS understands the importance of quality component choice, but also strives for the utmost quality from the design perspective. Implementing a metal

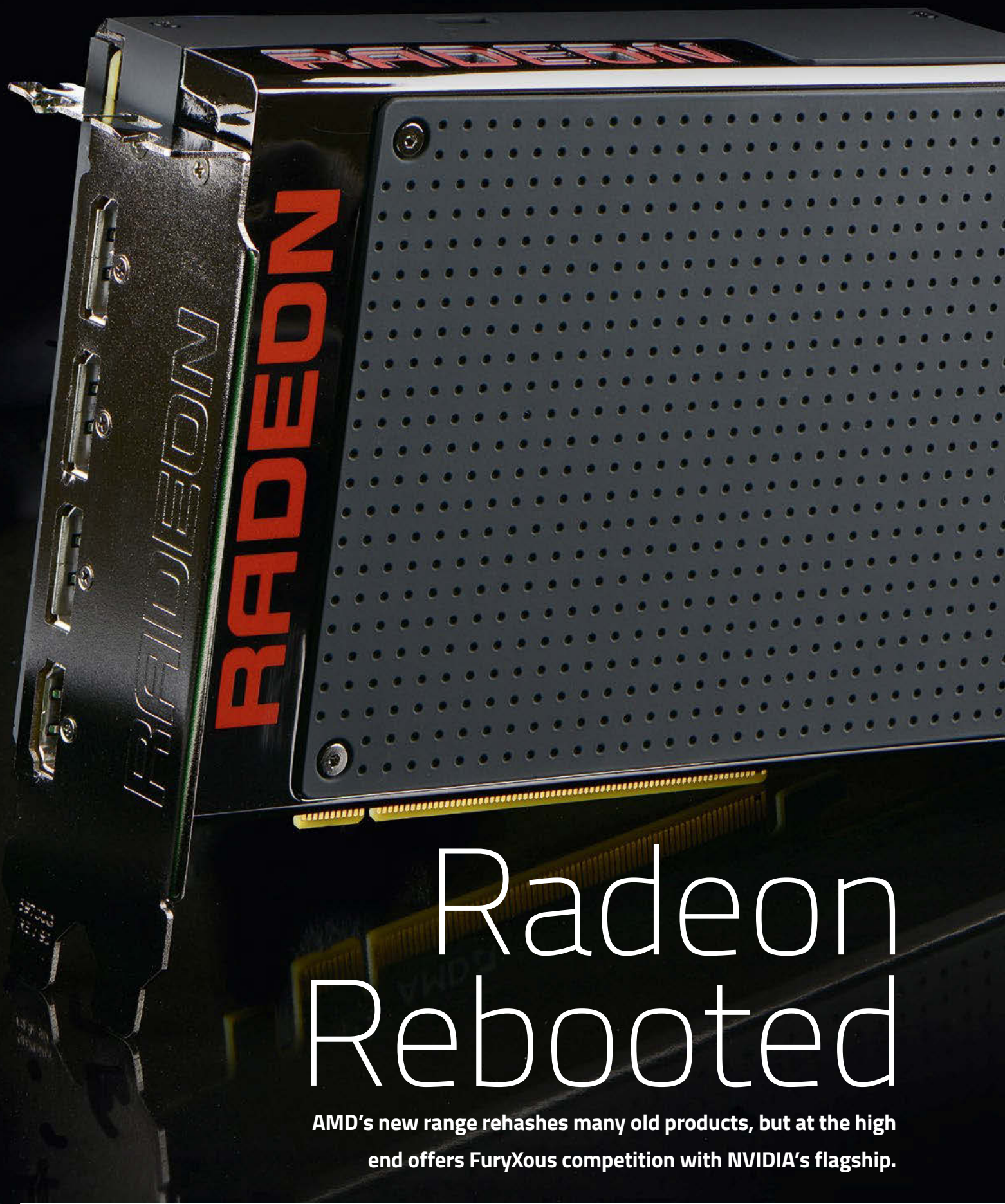
backplate, this part of the STRIX R9 390X heatsink solution reduces potential for GPU PCB sag – a frustration for any gaming enthusiast. Furthermore, with the addition of the new

GPU-Fortifier, there is now even more rigidity within the card's structure, ensuring the heatsink maintains a flush contact with the GPU core, maximising cooling ability.

ASUS AUTO-EXTREME TECHNOLOGY

Twenty Years of Graphics Innovation

Celebrating twenty years of graphics card manufacturing and innovation in 2015, ASUS has a proud history of leading graphics card design, pushing the boundaries for further advancements and improvements with the end user constantly in mind. It's with this attitude ASUS has fortified its position as a leader in graphics card technology development.



Radeon Rebooted

AMD's new range rehashes many old products, but at the high end offers FuryXous competition with NVIDIA's flagship.



Thank god for GPU manufacturers. With Intel holding a vice-like grip on the CPU market, while Samsung stitches up the SSD competition, it's nice to see one segment of PC gaming hardware that remains fiercely competitive. AMD and NVIDIA have been playing a game of one-upmanship for the last half decade, and neither has held the lead for an extended period of time. With performance increases of 30% or better each and every year, PC gamers have enjoyed subsequent leaps in gaming graphics that our console-cousins could only dream about. The fight continues this month with AMD launching its 2015 family of graphics cards, from the Fury X at the top of the stack right down to the R7 370 at the bottom. However, unlike prior launches, the new range is comprised of a mixture of new and old, with AMD dusting off its old designs for certain cards, while using a brand new design at the high end.

REBADGING SHENANIGANS

We'll start with the boring bits first, the Radeon R9 300 series – if you'd rather get straight to the juicy news, leap ahead to our section on the new Fury X product a couple of pages over. But first let's talk rebadging, as AMD has launched several products as the R9 300 family, and they're intended to cover the low to mid-range budget. They're not exactly exciting because each product is simply a rebadged and slightly tweaked version of older AMD products. Let's take a look at each of the major releases in this family to see just what's changed, starting from the bottom up.

RADEON R7 360

At the time of writing, there wasn't a single store in Australia with stock of R7 360 products, despite AMD claiming they'd launch two weeks

earlier. According to the marketing material, AMD intends this entry-level baby to sell with an RRP of \$169, so shave \$10 to \$20 off to get the real world pricing. At this price it's going head to head with NVIDIA's GTX 750. The R7 360 is the successor to the R7 260, which was basically a rebadge of 2013's Radeon HD 7790, and the specs are almost identical. It has the same number of Stream Processors (768), Texture Units (48) and ROPs (16) as its predecessor, along with an identical 128-bit memory bus. The Bonaire GPU within uses AMD's Graphics Core Next (GCN) 1.1 design, the same as both the R7 260 and HD 7790. Memory speed has been given a slight boost though, increasing to 6.5Gbps, and there's more of it, with the amount of onboard GDDR5 doubling to 2GB. The only other change is a tiny increase in the Boost clock, up from 1000MHz to 1050MHz. We didn't have any samples of this product, but we can expect it to perform around 5% faster than the R7 260. In other words, pretty damn slow. 1080p gaming should be possible, provided you crank all of the details to low.

RADEON R7 370

Unlike the R7 360, stock of the R7 370 had landed in Australia after the June 19 launch date, with pricing starting at \$239 for the Sapphire version. MSI supplied us with its variant, the R7 370 Gaming 4G, which has a street price of \$279, pitting it against the cheapest GTX 960 products. The 370 is based on the same Pitcairn-based GPU of the R7 265... which astute readers will remember was the basis for the elderly Radeon HD 7850. Yep, we're talking about a processor that launched three years ago, so you can understand why we're not too excited about it. As a result, it's the only product in AMD's new range that uses the original GCN 1.0 architecture, which means it doesn't support



AMD thankfully increased the memory speed though, now using 6Gbps compared to 5Gbps in the last generation

FreeSync, True Audio or hardware video decoding over 1080p. Once again we see the R7 370 launching with basically identical specs to the R7 265/HD 7850, with 1024 Stream Processors, 64 Texture Units and 32 ROPs. However, the Boost speed has been given a nudge up to 975MHz from the 265's 925MHz, yet the memory speed remains at 5.6Gbps. The reference design only carries 2GB of memory, but MSI's take on the card doubles this to 4GB. Expect basically identical performance to an R9 295, which means 1080p at low to middling settings.

RADEON R9 380

Welcome to another old product made new again, and in this case it's the R9 285 that's getting a facelift. MSI supplied us with its R9 380 Gaming 4G card, which is currently retailing for \$339 thanks to the 4GB of onboard memory. MSI sells a 2GB version of the

card for \$299, and at this price the R9 380 remains in the same price range as NVIDIA's GTX 960, albeit slightly overclocked versions such as MSI's GTX 960 Gaming 100 Million Edition. At the heart of this graphics card is the Tonga GPU, which also featured in the Radeon R9 280... which was basically an enhanced version of the Radeon HD 7950, another three year old GPU. However, the GPU in the 380 now features version 1.2 of GCN, which brings full support for AMD's feature-set. You guessed it, it has the exact same specs as its predecessor, with 1792 Stream Processors, 112 Texture Units, and 32 ROPs. Again we see an incremental increase in Boost speed, up from the 280's 933MHz to 970MHz, a piddling 3.9% increase. Memory speed and bus-width is unchanged, so naturally we can expect a massive performance leap of approximately 4%. Yes, that's sarcasm. 1080p at a mixture of medium and high detail should be possible in most games.

RADEON R9 390 AND 390X

Unfortunately we weren't able to source a review sample of the new R9 390, but a quick search of www.staticice.com.au revealed that it's currently selling

down under for \$499. It's a shame, as this product promises to be one of the better value offerings in AMD's new/old range, and it faces off against NVIDIA's GTX 970 at this price. We were able to get an R9 390X though, thanks to Sapphire sending over its new Tri-X R9 390X, which retails for \$689, putting it squarely in GTX 980 territory. The 390 is based on the old R9 290, which thankfully isn't just a rebadge of a prior HD 7000 series card. It's still a two-year old chip though, as the Hawaii GPU inside first debuted in the 290 back in November 2013. Both share the same 2560 Stream Processors, 160 Texture Units and 64 ROPs, while the Boost speed has been upped to 1000MHz in the newer product from the original's 947MHz. AMD has thankfully increased the memory speed though, now using 6Gbps compared to 5Gbps in the last generation, running over the same uber-wide 512-bit bus. This should help improve framerates by up to 20% when resolution is the defining factor, and the 390 also now features a whopping 8GB of onboard memory, twice that of the 290.

The 390X has similar properties to the 390, in that it's basically identical to the older 290X but with an improved



memory subsystem.

Stream processors remain at 2816, with 176 Texture Units and 64 ROPs, while the Boost speed is increased 5% to 1050MHz. The same 6Gbps memory leap features on the 390X, and again AMD has doubled the amount to 8GB. AMD is rather hilariously pitching the new R9 390X as a 4K-ready card, which we find rather absurd. Considering twin GTX 980 cards struggle with maintaining 60fps at 4K, what hope does a single 390X have? None. Instead we anticipate this to be a solid card for 1080p at High detail, or 2560 x 1440 with some of the options backed off a little.

MEET FURY X - THE MEMORY MASTER

If you're like us, you're probably feeling a little underwhelmed about the "new" Radeon R9 300 series, as it's a mixture of two and three-year old technology with only the smallest of changes, mainly branding. Bless the silicon gods then that AMD's other new product range, Fury, is a far more exciting proposition. At the time of writing AMD had only launched the top-end Fury product, the R9 Fury X, and we were able to source the first sample in Australia. It might borrow some of the

same technology from the R9 390X and earlier R9 290X, but it's also the first GPU on the market to make use of a new technology that will revolutionise the way today's graphics processors are made.

This new technology is called High Bandwidth Memory, or HBM for short, and it's at the heart of the new Fury range of products. Until now, traditional graphics card design has kept the GPU and its memory separate, with the onboard memory modules located on the Printed Circuit Board (PCB) that is the backbone of a graphics card. This is part of the reason why today's graphics cards have become so big, as the PCB must have room for the increasing number of memory modules. Each memory module is connected to the GPU via traces in the PCB, and these can measure several centimetres in length. Whenever the GPU needs to access data in its memory, said data has to travel over the PCB to

the GPU, which takes time.

HBM takes a radically different approach. The GPU is now mounted on a special component called the Interposer, which is slightly larger than the GPU itself. The memory is then mounted onto the transposer, and it adopts a 3D packaging method, where the memory chips are stacked on top of each other. This results in a massive space saving – if you look at our photo of the GPU and Interposer, you'll see we've highlighted four tiny squares, with two sitting on opposite sides of the GPU. That's the 4GB of memory that comes with the Fury X, and it's exponentially smaller than the GDDR5 memory modules used by today's graphics cards.

So HBM delivers smaller memory modules, which allows for much shorter graphics cards, but it's the increase in memory bandwidth that makes this stuff so special. Where the Radeon R9 390X has an industry-leading 512-bit memory bus, the HBM memory on the Fury X increases this eight-fold, to a whopping 4096-bit bus. At the same time the frequency of each module is vastly decreased, down to just 500MHz on the Fury X (effectively 1000MHz as it's double-pumped). Yet thanks to



AMD Radeon R9 Fury X

■ Thankfully not all games require such a huge amount of memory, and in these instances the Fury X should deliver ■

the ultra-wide bus, the total memory bandwidth delivered on Fury X is an insane 512GB per sec. Yep, over half a Terabyte of data can be shunted between the memory modules and the GPU every second, which is a huge 60% increase over the 320GB/sec offered by the R9 290X. Yet it's also incredibly power efficient, requiring just 15% of the energy demanded by GDDR5.

AMD first started work on HBM almost a decade ago, in 2008, and in 2013 it became a JEDEC industry standard. This means NVIDIA is free to use it, and it will feature on its upcoming Pascal GPU in 2016, but NVIDIA will be using HBM2 instead, for one important reason. The first iteration of HBM is limited to 4GB of memory, which is why the Fury X graphics card ships with this amount, while HBM2 allows up to 32GB. Uh oh.

While the HBM memory on the Fury X has more than enough bandwidth to

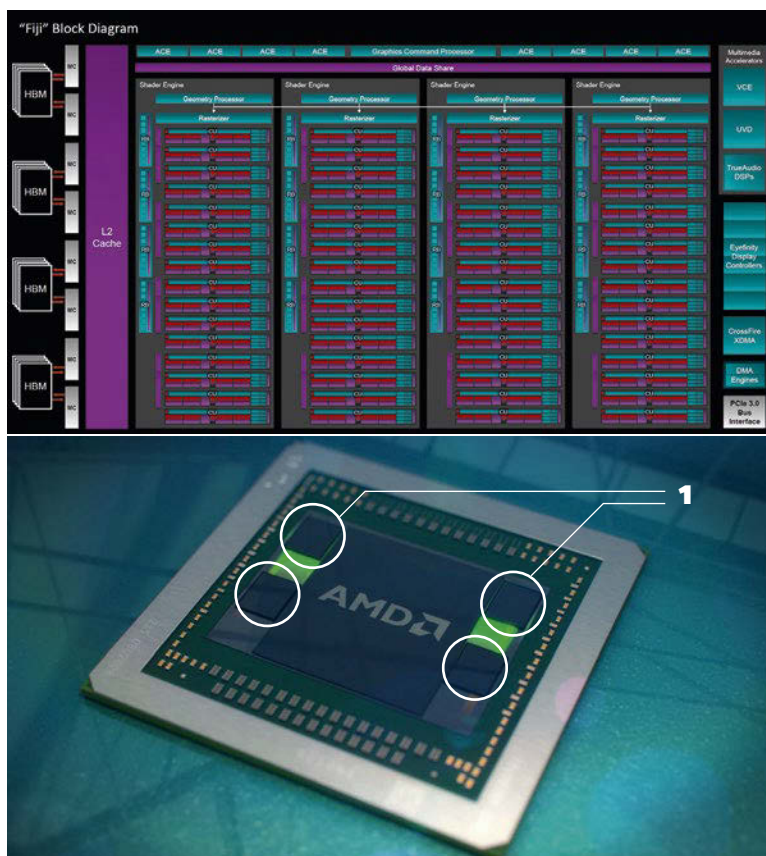
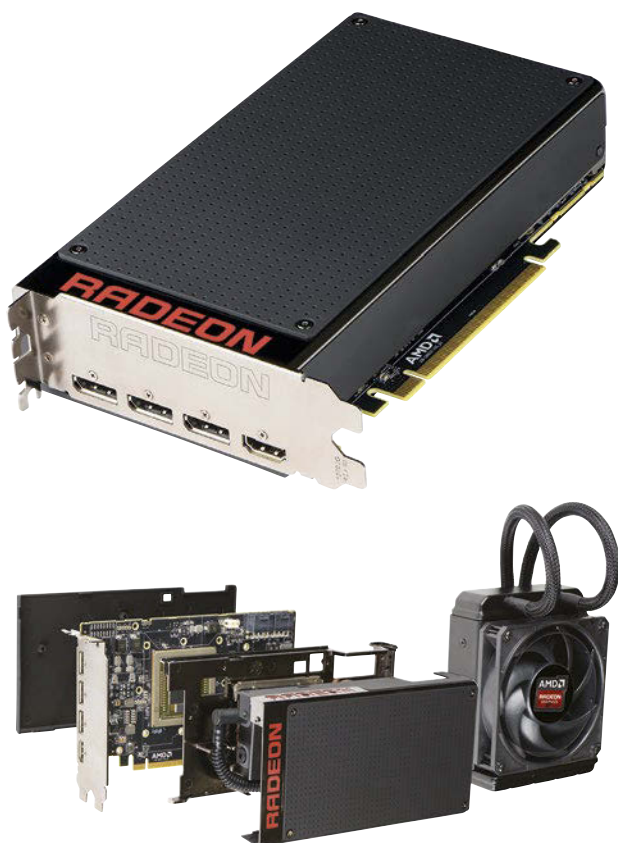
power 4K displays, thanks to AMD's past marketing efforts we all know that 4K gaming often requires more than 4GB of onboard memory. It's very easy to fill upwards of 5GB of onboard memory in a game like GTAV running at 4K resolution with all of the details cranked to their highest. This is a rather large problem for the Fury X, as in these instances it will need to swap data from the PC's RAM to the memory modules on the graphics card, which can cause massive performance decreases. We were able to test this quite easily. We ran GTAV in two different modes; the first had basically everything maxed at 4K resolution, and it required a hefty 5382MB of onboard memory in this mode. We then ran the in-game benchmark, keeping our eyes peeled for the minimum framerate, which would occur when the Fury X had to fetch data from the PC's RAM. The benchmark spat out a minimum framerate of just 2.4fps. We then lowered the texture resolution and NPC variety, which lowered the amount of memory required to 4045MB while pushing the same number of polygons and pixels. The result was a minimum framerate of 15.52, showing just how much faster the Fury X is when it doesn't need to fetch data from the

PC's memory.

Given AMD's penchant for promoting the amount of onboard memory on its graphics cards, it has found itself in quite an interesting marketing quandary with Fury X. How can it justify the inclusion of 8GB of memory on an R9 390X when its flagship Fury X only has half of that amount? AMD claims that it will minimise these issues by hand-crafting its drivers to better manage the memory requirements of games, but we're extremely sceptical. It doesn't matter how clever AMD's Catalyst drivers are, some games will always require more than 4GB of onboard memory when running at high resolutions and/or anti-aliasing settings.

LET'S GO TO FIJI

Thankfully not all games require such a huge amount of memory, and in these instances the Fury X should deliver excellent 4K performance. That's because the Fiji GPU at the heart of the Fury X is the fastest GPU AMD has ever built. It's using the same the GCN 1.2 design that first shipped in the Tonga GPU found in the R9 285, but has been improved with better tessellation performance. Where the R9 390X and 290X both have 2816 Stream



Processors, the Fiji GPU increases this by 45% up to 4012. The Texture Units have also been massively increased, up from 176 to 256, yet strangely AMD did not increase the ROPs, leaving it at just 64, identical to the 390X/290X. The ROP is one of the last steps in the render pipeline, and limiting it to 64 could have an impact on performance.

Thanks to the huge increase in complexity, the Fiji GPU is comprised of a whopping 8.9 billion transistors, not including the interposer or HBM. It's built on the existing 28nm process, and runs with a Boost frequency of 1050MHz, which explains why it has a rather steamy TDP of 275W. That's not crazy high though, as NVIDIA's GTX 980 Ti has a 250W TDP, which it handles ably with an air cooler. Yet AMD has equipped the Fury X with an all-in-one water cooler with external radiator, supplied by Cooler Master. We think it's probably due to the size of Fury X; thanks to the lack of memory modules AMD has been able to shrink the PCB to just 7.5 inches long, making it suitable for smaller HTPC and SFF builds, though you'll still need to find a spot for the Fury X's 120mm radiator. With such a short PCB length, an air-cooler of the same size would struggle to keep the

GPU nice and chilly. Thanks to the water cooling we didn't see temperatures exceed 50C during our testing, while the fan was rather quiet at just 45dB.

All Fury X cards will be built with AMD's reference design, which means they'll all perform and overclock identically. It also means they'll have the exact same I/O configuration of one HDMI 1.4 and three DisplayPort 1.2a outputs. The lack of HDMI 2.0 is mind-boggling given its intended 4K audience; with affordable 4K TV sets now the norm, and this card just the right size for an HTPC, the lack of HDMI 2.0 will hurt it amongst living room gamers. When questioned about this, AMD mentioned it's working on active DisplayPort to HDMI 2.0 dongles with external partners, but we'll believe in them when we see them. As for pricing, at the time of writing Fury X was widely available in stores, with the Sapphire version starting at \$999, placing it head to head against the GeForce GTX 980 Ti.

TESTING TIMES

We ran two separate sets of benchmarks on AMD's new products. For its R9 300 series we ran the usual PC PowerPlay benchmarks of 3DMark FireStrike, Grid AutoSport and Shadow

of Mordor. Given that we had the exclusive on the Fury X, and its intended role as a 4K graphics card, we ran a different set for AMD's new flagship, focusing on 2560 x 1440 and 3840 x 2160 performance across a wider variety of titles.

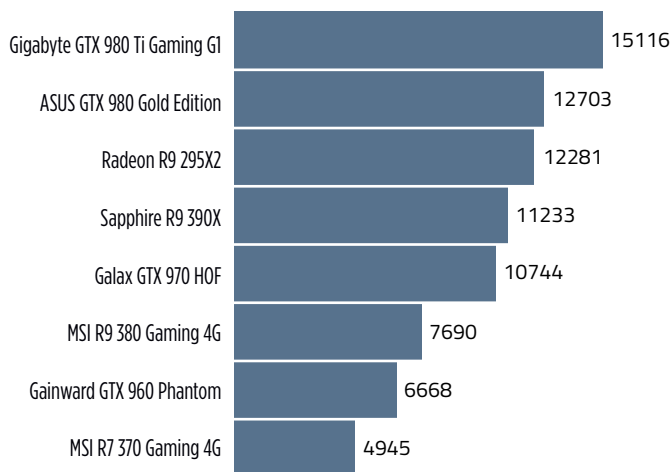
Looking at the 300 series results first, we should point out that our NVIDIA-based cards are all factory overclocked, with both the GTX 970 and 980 Ti around 10% faster than stock, and the GTX 980 around 20% faster, which is why we've listed the prices for these products as well.

Unfortunately for AMD its 300 series cards don't fare too well against NVIDIA's. The MSI R7 370 Gaming 4G was thoroughly outclassed by the GTX 960, despite the 960 only costing \$30 more. The MSI R9 380 Gaming 4G told a different story though, edging out the similarly priced GTX 960, making it the ideal card for those with around \$300 to spend (though you could save yourself \$60 and pick up an R9 280 and overclock it). Finally we have the R9 390X, which basically went neck and neck with the GTX 970, despite costing \$100 more. At \$689 it's possible to pick up a basic GTX 980, and the R9 390X simply can't compete with one of these beasts.

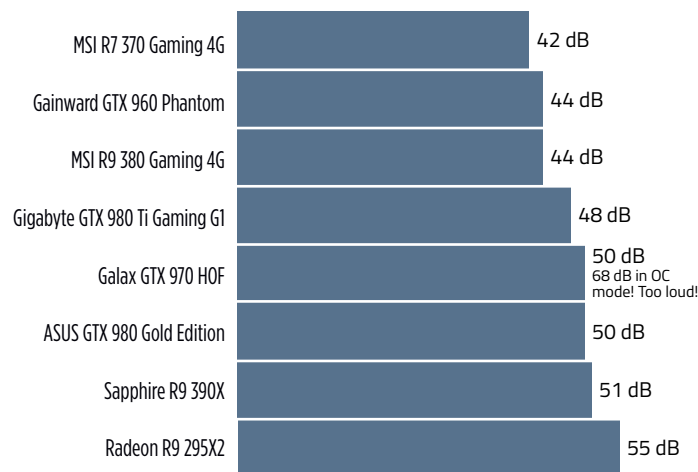
1. These are the RAM chips, mounted on the actual GPU.

Radeon Benchmarks

3DMARK Firestrike Score

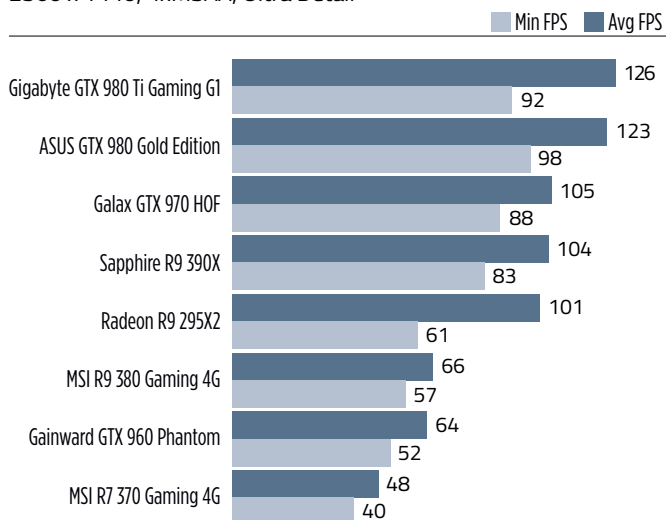


SHADOW OF MORDOR Fan Noise



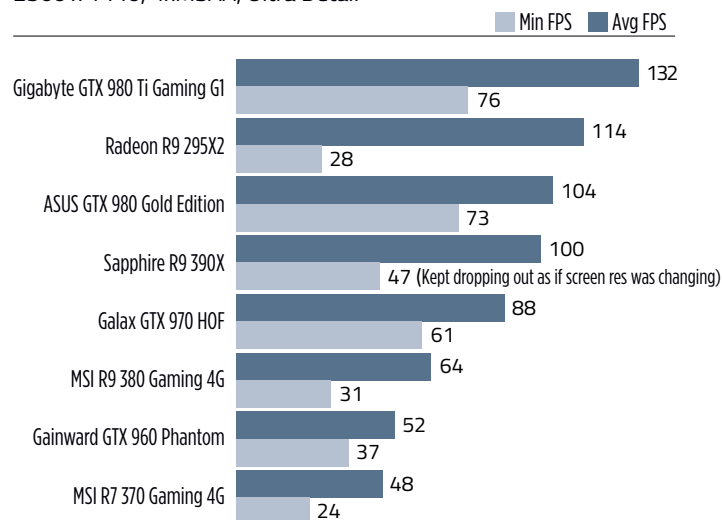
GRID AUTOSPORT Benchmarks

2560 x 1440, 4xMSAA, Ultra Detail



SHADOW OF MORDOR

2560 x 1440, 4xMSAA, Ultra Detail



Thankfully the Fury X told a much more compelling story. Once we remove the Gigabyte's 10% performance boost due to its factory overclock, we can see that the Fury X comes close to reference GTX 980 Ti performance. It's not quite enough to overtake the GTX 980 Ti, but at least AMD has delivered something competitive. Hopefully improved drivers will help the Fury X close the gap and overtake the GTX 980 Ti, forcing NVIDIA to cut prices until its next range of products are ready sometime in 2016.

We also tested the Fury X's overclocking ability, which only allows

GPU overclocking. We managed to hit a top stable Boost speed of just 1120MHz, which is a minor speed bump over the default of 1050MHz, and is rather disappointing given the cool operating temperatures of the GPU. Expect to see a 5% improvement in frame rates with this level of overclock, which is well below the 20% overlocks NVIDIA users are seeing with the GTX 980 Ti. Meanwhile the memory is not overlockable as yet, but this appears to be a driver limitation; we've seen online results using hacked drivers that boosted the memory

frequency by a very impressive 20%. Hopefully AMD unlocks this potential in the future.

IT'S ALL ABOUT THE FURY X

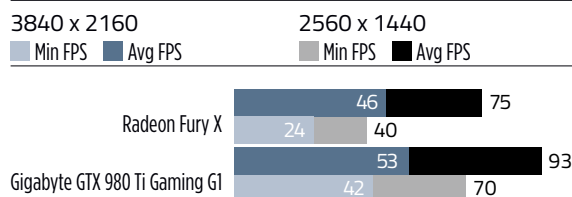
As you can see, we're not really enamoured by the new R9 300 series. NVIDIA offers better performance at the same price point as most of these cards, with the exception of the R9 380, which seems to be the best buy around the \$300 price point. But at this price point AMD's own R9 280 offers stiff competition, as it's \$60 cheaper and can easily be overclocked to 380 speeds.

Fury X Benchmarks

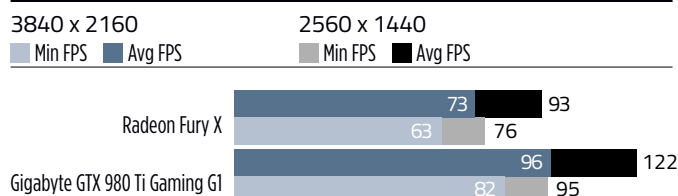
3DMARK Firestrike Ultra (3840 x 2160)



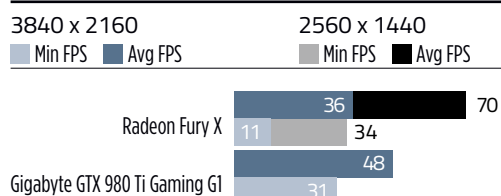
SHADOW OF MORDOR Ultra Detail



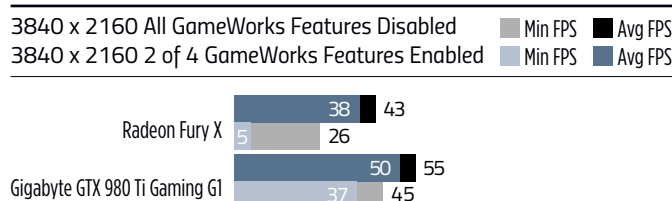
GRID AUTOSPORT Ultra Detail



METRO 2033 Very High Detail SSAA off



BATMAN ARKHAM KNIGHT Ultra



The upper end paints a much rosier picture though, albeit not quite the NVIDIA smack-down we'd hoped. The Fury X delivers solid 4K performance for a grand, and it's likely to get even better once AMD tunes its drivers.

However, if we had a grand to spend, we'd still lean towards NVIDIA's GTX 980 Ti. For starters, it's much more overclockable, leading to palpable performance boosts over the Fury

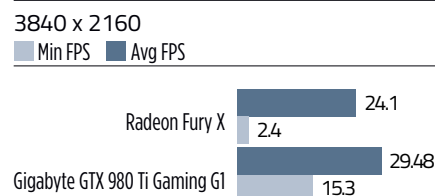
X. More importantly, it has 6GB of onboard memory, which will definitely be noticeable in certain, memory-hungry titles. Finally, and this is a biggie, AMD's driver support for its Radeon line has been pretty abominable over the last six months. The last official WHQL driver released by AMD was at the end of 2014; meanwhile NVIDIA pops them out every fortnight or so. The red corner really needs to lift its

3DMARK Firestrike Extreme (2560 x 1440)



GRAND THEFT AUTO TORTURE TEST

Everything maxed except: MSAA x4; Reflection MSAA: x2; Grass Quality: Very High; Soft Shadows: Softest; Motion Blur 0; Frame Scaling Disabled. Memory used: 5382GB

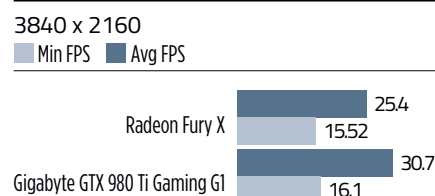


Fan Noise
dBs (lower is better)



GRAND THEFT AUTO TORTURE TEST

with sub 4GB memory usage. Same as Torture Test but Population Variety set to minimum, and Texture Quality set to normal. Memory used: 4045MB



game in this regard to give Fury X the attention it deserves. Hopefully if it does, the memory and overclocking issues will become a moot point, and Fiji can drive AMD back into the top spot. With more cards in the Fury series due in the coming months, we look forward to seeing what else the Fiji chip can do; we've got a feeling both the GTX 980 and 970 are going to feel some considerable heat. **BENNETT RING**



NOTEBOOK

Aorus X5

An ode to NVIDIA

PRICE \$3199

www.aorus.com

Aorus claims that this is the world's fastest 15.6" gaming notebook, which is a rather bold claim to make. But a quick scan of competitor's models confirms that this is indeed the only one gaming laptop of this size on the market with a dual GPU configuration. Stuffing twin graphics processors into a 15.6 inch laptop is no easy feat, but Aorus has had to pay a price to do so.

The twin GPUs in question are NVIDIA's GeForce GTX 965M, which is the desktop equivalent of a GTX 960. It's a superior product to the woeful GTX 960M that powered so many budget gaming laptops at the start of the year, and shoving two of them inside the X5 gives this machine the performance required to power through anything you can throw at it. However, a 15.6" laptop is not a big place, and running twin GPUs equals more heat output, so you can guess how noisy the X5 is whilst gaming. We tested the machine with the fans set to gaming mode, and measured a very loud 59dB of fan noise. As with

the X3, lowering the fan speed to quiet mode dramatically reduced fan noise to just 42dB, but performance dropped by over 70%. Even the normal fan mode dropped performance by half, so gaming mode is the only way to extract the true performance out of the twin GPUs.

Continuing the NVIDIA love is the inclusion of a G-Sync display, one of the first we've seen on a gaming laptop. It's the perfect place for one, as laptops traditionally struggle to maintain 60fps, and G-Sync makes framerates of 40 and above look perfectly smooth. Throw twin GPUs into the mix and you have a machine that can deliver smooth performance in basically any game on the market. Our benchmarks don't really show it though, as the system is CPU limited at the 1080p resolution we tested at. It should even be possible to make the most of the screen's native 2880 x 1620 resolution in slightly less demanding games.

Backing up the powerful graphics hardware is the Intel Core i7-5700HQ,

a quad-cored Hyperthreaded chip that tops out at 3.5GHz under load. 16GB of DDR3-1866 memory is ample for this system, while the hard drive space is also exemplary. Our sample had twin M.2 256GB SSDs in RAID 0 mode, along with a 1TB 7,200RPM mechanical drive.

Weighing just 2.5kg, this 15.6" is surprisingly mobile considering the specs. It's built to Aorus' exacting standards, with a sturdiness that is lacking in other, lesser brands. Priced a touch over three grand, it's actually surprisingly affordable for such a beefy system, and the inclusion of twin GPUs plus a G-Sync display make this arguably the best 15.6 inch gaming laptop around. **BENNETT RING**

- Twin GPUs
- G-Sync display
- Well built

- Noisy fans

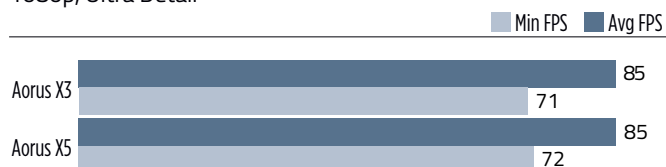
VERDICT:

Combine twin GPUs with a G-Sync display and the net result is a killer 15.6 inch gaming laptop.

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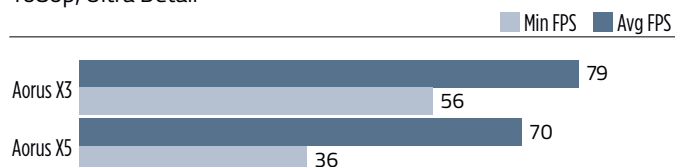
GRID AUTOSPORT Benchmarks

1080p, Ultra Detail



SHADOW OF MORDOR Benchmarks

1080p, Ultra Detail





NOTEBOOK

Aorus X3 Plus V3

Real gaming on the go

PRICE \$2899

www.aorus.com

It seems that Aorus can do no wrong. This off-shoot of Gigabyte has been releasing top-notch gaming laptops since it sprang into creation a couple of years ago, and we can't think of a single Aorus laptop that we haven't loved. Obviously there's a price to pay for such perfection, with their gaming machines tending towards the ritzier end of town, but those looking for a machine that is as mobile as it is powerful tend to have slightly thicker wallets than the rest of us.

The 13.9 inch screen might be relatively small, but Aorus has packed it with 3200 x 1800 pixels, making it ludicrously crisp but also leading to readability issues in applications that don't properly support font scaling. Driving this display is NVIDIA's tasty GeForce GTX 970M mobile processor with 6GB of GDDR5 memory, which is roughly equivalent to something between a desktop GTX 760 or 770. It's not even close to powerful enough to drive games at the screen's native refresh rate, but is a capable performer with 1080p resolutions.

Housed within the aluminium chassis is Intel's Core i7-4710HQ mobile processor. It's a capable chip for such a small unit, with four Hyperthreaded cores hitting 3.5GHz when Intel's Turbo mode kicks in. There's plenty of system memory to feed it, with 16GB of DDR3-1600. Aorus offers up to three 512GB mSATA drives in RAID 0 mode. Our review unit wasn't quite as generous with the storage though, shipping with twin 256GB mSATA drives in RAID 0 mode, delivering a total of 461GB storage space.

The entire machine feels very sturdy thanks to its metal case, while the matte finish on the screen makes it suitable for use in bright environments where glare might usually be an issue. The keyboard is a decent size for such a small laptop, and there are even five macro keys down the left hand side. The touch pad feels extremely accurate, although the buttons are a tad bit stiff.

Gigabyte includes fan-control software with the X3, and recommended

we test it in high-speed mode. Doing so yielded a very annoying 63dB of fan noise, so we dropped it to Stealth mode. While this tamed fan noise entirely, performance dropped by an incredible 50%. Thankfully there's a middle ground in the low-speed fan setting, which dropped the fan noise to a still audible 57dB, without harming performance.

Weighing a mere 1.87kg, Aorus has delivered a potent little performer that can actually play serious games, albeit with the detail options set to middling. It's damn expensive though, especially when you consider something like the X5, but that's the price you pay for extreme mobility. **BENNETT RING PC**

- Small and light
- Excellent specs
- Crisp display

- Noisy fans
- Extremely high price point

VERDICT:

Aorus proves that it is possible to build a small gaming laptop that has the power to play, provided you've got the dosh to afford it.

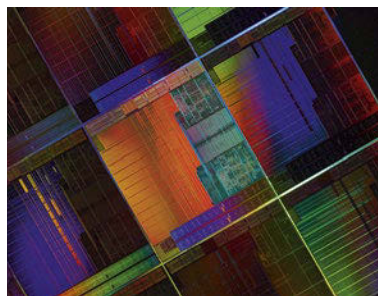
8

3DMARK FireStrike

Aorus X3 - Max Speed Fan Mode	6602
Aorus X3 - Stealth Fan Mode	3300
Aorus X3 - Low Speed Fan Mode	6608
Aorus X5 - Gaming Fan Mode	7807
Aorus X5 - Quiet Speed Fan Mode	2228
Aorus X5 - Normal Speed Fan Mode	3445

FAN NOISE

Aorus X3 - Max Speed Fan Mode	63dB
Aorus X3 - Stealth Fan Mode	can't hear over background noise
Aorus X3 - Low Speed Fan Mode	57dB
Aorus X5 - Gaming Fan Mode	59dB
Aorus X5 - Quiet Speed Fan Mode	42dB
Aorus X5 - Normal Speed Fan Mode	51dB



APU

AMD A10 7870K

AMD gives its APUs a facelift

PRICE \$199
www.amd.com

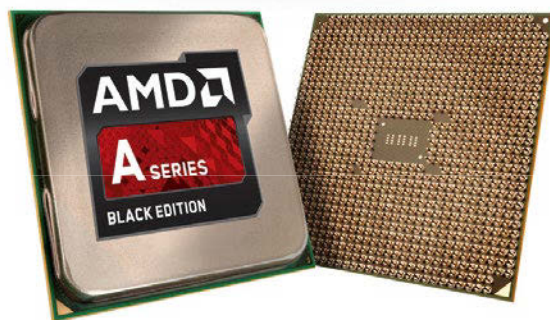
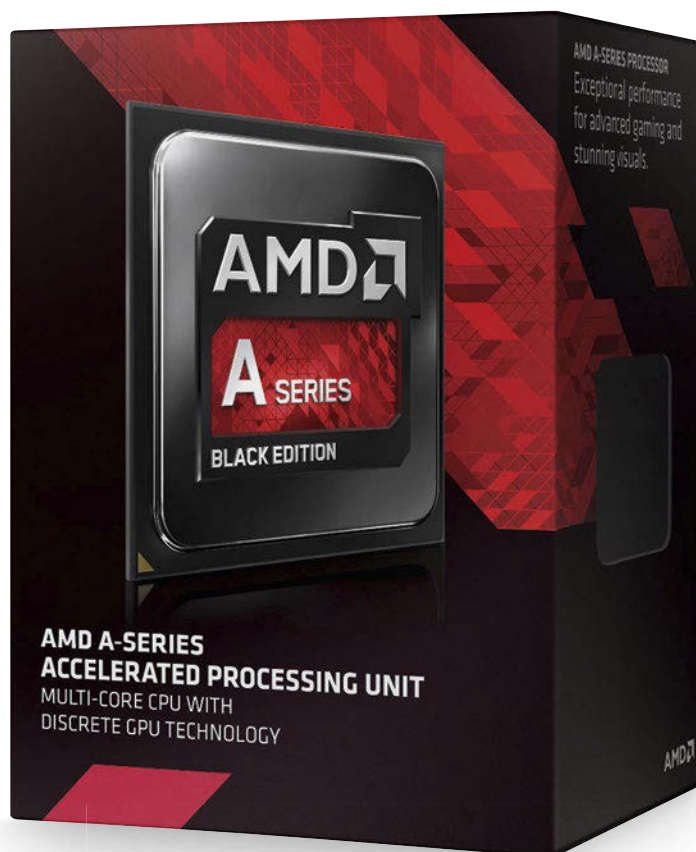
AMD's non-graphics chips have been floundering for a couple of years now, with Intel CPUs the go-to solution for gamers who demand the best performance. It's made some strides with its range of Accelerated Processing Units, or APUs for short, as their integrated Radeon graphics handily lay the smack down on Intel's woeful integrated GPUs. However, here at PCPP we don't look at the APUs very often as AMD's dedicated CPUs tend to be better gaming chips. But the release of the 7870K warrants a closer look, as it's packing a refreshed version of the Kaveri core we've already seen in earlier APUs. Is it enough to lift AMD out of the doldrums?

The new CPU design used within has been confusingly referred to as Godavari by some hardware companies, which suggests a major departure from the Kaveri design rolled out over the last year or so. However, closer examination reveals that it's simply Kaveri with a facelift. The biggest change is a leap in frequency of the CPU side of this chip, with the 7870K having a maximum turbo speed of 4.1GHz. The integrated graphics have also been given a shot in the arm, with a sizeable speed jump from 720MHz up to 866MHz. Yet these

increases haven't been a result of new design improvements – it's simply a matter of finding the right processors via the process called binning, a mature manufacturing process and slight voltage increases.

The rest of the APU remains identical to the A10-7850K. It has 4 CPU compute cores and 8 GPU compute cores, with a 4MB L2 cache. When compared to a desktop Radeon piece, the 512 Stream Processors might not sound like much, but it's enough to handily beat down Intel's integrated GPUs. Unfortunately it's still not quite good enough for serious gamers. We ran Grid Autosport at 1080p but dropped the graphics details down to medium, and clocked up a result of 49fps, with a minimum framerate of 39fps. Next up was Shadow of Mordor and, due to the lacklustre result in Grid, we dropped the graphics settings to low, with a resolution of just 1280 x 720. The average framerate of 52 isn't too shabby for internal graphics, but the low point of 31fps shows just how bad it becomes when the APU struggles.

We know that the A10 series isn't great when paired with a discrete GPU compared to an Intel CPU doing the same duties, and unfortunately the



7870K didn't change our mind. When compared to a Core i3 4350, which is \$40 cheaper, the 7870K was around 10% slower in Grid and 40% slower in Shadow of Mordor, both run at 1080p with a GTX 980.

While there's scope here to build a very basic, extremely affordable gaming box with this APU, for serious gamers like you lot, AMD still has a long way to go before recapturing the glory days of its original Athlon. **BENNETT RING PC**

• Decent integrated GPU performance

• Slower than cheaper Intel CPUs when used with discrete GPU

VERDICT:

A slight speed boost isn't enough to make this chip worthwhile for serious gamers.

6



DISPLAY

ASUS MG279Q

Not just another FreeSync display

PRICE \$999
www.amd.com

A grand for a 27 inch gaming display might sound like a bit much, especially when it's possible to pick up budget screens of the same size for a third of the cost. But the MG279Q isn't your average, everyday display. This sucker is built from the ground up for gaming, and is one of the first to use an IPS display for the purpose.

Until now gamers have had to make do with TN panels for gaming, as they offered vastly superior pixel response times. Meanwhile IPS panels had the advantage for wider viewing angles and better colour and contrast reproduction. ASUS is only the second company (after Acer) to figure out how to build a gaming display based on IPS technology, which it has employed here in the MG279Q.

It's a 2560 x 1440 panel, which is the perfect resolution for a screen of this size, and it purrs along at the brisk pace of 144Hz. ASUS has wisely endowed this display with full support for Adaptive Sync as well as AMD's FreeSync, which offers the same motion-smoothing features as NVIDIA's G-Sync. However, likely as a result of the use of the IPS panel, it doesn't support FreeSync all the way up to 144Hz. Instead it tops out at 90Hz, which is still plenty fast enough

for us. The good news is that at the low end it offers support for FreeSync all the way down to 35Hz, which is about as low as you want to go before the image starts looking juddery. However, according to ASUS, it'll support 144Hz via Adaptive Sync, which is a whole other kettle of fish – we'll be doing a mini-feature on this next month to explain it more in detail.

Unlike G-Sync displays, which are limited to a single input, the MG279Q has plenty of input options. Twin HDMI 1.4/MHL 2.0, one full-sized DisplayPort 1.2 and one mini DisplayPort 1.2 reside on the back, and there's also twin USB 3.0 ports. We love the base ASUS has used on this screen, which makes it extremely flexible when it comes to setup time.

As for the most important facet, image quality, the MG279Q is a beast. Once we'd turned down the overly bright out-of-the-box settings, we were very impressed by its colour reproduction. Contrast performance was also excellent, easily conveying detail in dark areas while playing Batman Arkham Knight. Viewing angles were nice and wide, as expected given the IPS panel.

Most importantly, motion blur was extremely minimal, easily competing

■ We love the base ASUS has used on this screen, which makes it extremely flexible when it comes to setup time ■

with TN panels that we've used in the past. There are various settings to lower the pixel response time, but even at default this thing cranks out an impressive, blur-free picture. Our only concern is the heady price; Adaptive Sync technology isn't meant to add to the price too much, so it's likely the ground-breaking use of an IPS panel that has boosted this to the \$1000 price point. Still, if you've got that much money to spare, you'll be hard pressed to find a better 27 inch gaming display.

BENNETT RING

- IPS quality colour and contrast
- Free of motion-blur
- FreeSync

- Rather expensive
- FreeSync 90Hz limit

VERDICT:

ASUS has delivered one of the best gaming displays on the market, and the price tag reflects this.

10

HOTWARE²⁴² with Terrence Jarrad

01 Pixelkabinett 42

Price: \$5500 • Distributor: Love Hulten
www.lovehulten.com

In 1950, this is probably what computers in 2015 looked like, while now we gush at its retro chic.

POWERED UP: Highly customisable options, from the type of system and games installed within, to the controls type and layout, colour, and audio options.

PLAYED OUT: Only 50 of these will be made, so be quick. Or alternatively, spend a lot of time and effort making your own. Either way it'll probably be valuable enough you won't want to actually use it in case you break something.

02 Xbox Elite

Price: \$150+ • Distributor: Microsoft
www.xbox.com

Created with professional and competitive gamers in mind, with collaboration from current pros, the Xbox Elite wireless controller just might help improve your game.

POWERED UP: Swappable thumbsticks and D-pad, four additional slots for paddles you can add or remove, customising the control experience to suit your meaty grip, and hair trigger locks give you the rapid fire ability you've always wanted, we imagine. And of course an app allows you to fine tune things even further.

PLAYED OUT: We know it has to be all nonsense because no "professional gamer" would use a gamepad. OH NO WE DI'NT. (We did.)

03 Holus Holographic Display

Price: \$600+ • Distributor: H+Technology
hplustech.com

By the time you read this, the Kickstarter will be over and it's already funded, so all going well, a holographic display could be a feature of your home.

POWERED UP: 3D holograms right in your home. Models, phonecalls, CAD designs

probably. All rendered in a weird cube pyramid thing.

PLAYED OUT: Holus? More like, HOLARIOUS, right? Seriously though, with Microsoft stealing the holographic show at E3, there seems to be layers of redundancy here, what with needing a huge bulky device to hold a hologram in a specific area, where MS puts them everywhere.

04 Aumeo

Price: \$170 • Distributor: Aumeo Audio
aumeoaudio.com

Everyone has different ears, apparently, and this means that when it comes to the act of hearing, a one-size-fits-all approach isn't optimal for getting the most out of our audio. The Aumeo then, is a personally tailored listening experience.

POWERED UP: Sits between device and headphones, just like a headphone amp, and corrects the sound based on your custom audio profile to ensure you hear everything. The profile is stored on the portable device, and now you have perfect custom audio everywhere you go!*

PLAYED OUT: *Everywhere you remember to take the Aumeo, or can be bothered taking it, since while it's small, it's sufficiently large to be annoying.

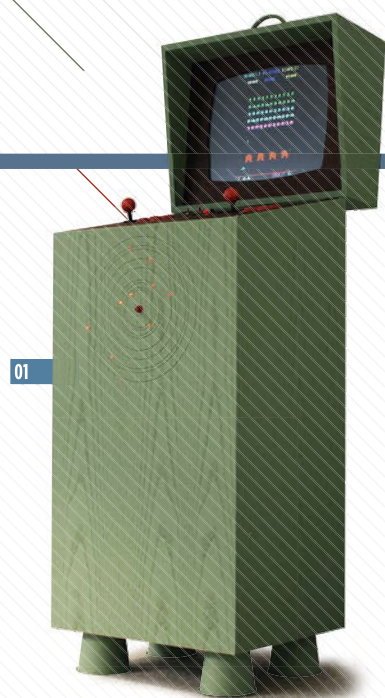
05 Tokyoflash Kisai Link

Price: \$105 • Distributor: Tokyoflash
www.tokyoflash.com

There are a range of smart Bluetooth wrist bands on the market today, and they all do things like notifications for emails, calls, and alarms. What they tend not to do, is look particularly interesting or different from each other, until now.

POWERED UP: A large range of styles available to suit any taste. Seriously. Beads, skulls, leather, metal, take your pick!

PLAYED OUT: Do you hate choice? Buy something from Apple instead.



01



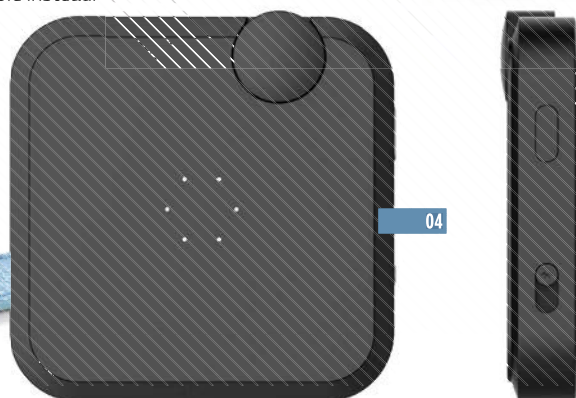
02



03



05



04

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PC PowerPlay

AUSTRALIA'S #1 PC GAMING MAG



OVERCLOCKING

ALL YOU NEED TO KNOW TO GET MAXIMUM GAME POWER

SKYLAKE MOBOS

GET READY FOR INTEL'S NEXT CHIPSET WITH OUR IN-DEPTH PREVIEWS

COMPUTEX 2015

THE LATEST AND GREATEST PC HARDWARE STRAIGHT FROM THE SHOW FLOOR

RADEON FURY X

AMD'S GTX 980 TI RIVAL BENCHMARKED AND REVIEWED!

ULTIMATE PC GAME GEAR

PRO-TIPS TO MAKE YOUR NEXT BUILD A STRESS-FREE, GREAT VALUE GAME BEAST

nextmedia



01

2015 TECH SPECIAL
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MORE PIXELS!

THE MOST POWERFUL VIDEOCARDS REVIEWED

BUY ONLINE AND SUBSCRIBE TO **PC PowerPlay** AT mymagazines.com.au

MENAGERIE

This month the Beast gets a triple-Titan X injection, bumping its total price up over twenty grand. Yowzers!

BUDGET

The perfect entry-level gaming PC

CPU

AMD FX-4300 Quad Core 3.8GHz 4 Core Black Edt.
\$145 www.amd.com

We're sticking with AMD's budget beauty.



MOBO

ASRock 980DE3/U3S3 AM3+
\$69 www.asrock.com.au

Our CPU needs a new ASRock home.



RAM

GelL 8GB Kit DDR3 Evo Veloce C9 1600MHz
\$85 www.geil.com.tw

In with the cheapest we can find



VIDEO

Sapphire Radeon R9 280X
\$349 www.sapphiretech.com

Enjoy 1080p performance with all the options



POWER

Cooler Master Thunder 500W
\$66 www.coolermaster.com

The budget beast doesn't need a lot of juice



SOUND

Sennheiser HD201 + ASUS Xonar DG
\$38 + \$33 www.sennheiser.com
www.asus.com.au

Headphones plus soundcard – yes!



OPTICAL

Lite-on DVD-RW
\$49 www.us.liteonit.com

We'd happily retire the drive, but some of you guys still believe in physical media.



STORAGE

Toshiba DT01ACA050 500GB HDD
\$59 www.toshiba.com.au

Half a Terabyte should handle everything.



DISPLAY

Samsung 24" S24D300H
\$199 www.samsung.com

Crystal clear 1920 x 1080 res gaming



CASE

BitFenix Shinobi
\$95 www.bitfenix.com

Nice for the price. This is the little brother of the case used in our Performance build.



KEYBOARD

Tt eSPORTS Challenger
\$49 www.thermaltake.com.au

Built for PC gamers. Macros, shortcuts, the lot.



MOUSE

Gigabyte M6900
\$26 www.gigabyte.com.au

A sensor resolution of 3200DPI will make your headshots count.



TOTAL: \$1,262

PERFORMANCE

Most bells and whistles, without breaking the bank

CPU

Intel 4th Generation Core i5-4670K + Cooler Master Hyper 612 PWM
\$299 + \$59 www.intel.com



MOBO

MSI Z97M-G43
\$139 www.msi.com.tw

Z97 doesn't get cheaper than this.



RAM

GelL 8GB Kit DDR3 Evo Veloce C9 1600MHz
\$85 www.geil.com.tw

In with the cheapest we can find



VIDEO

Galaxy GTX970-4GD5
\$499 www.galaxytechus.com

NVIDIA's mid-range card is perfect



POWER

Corsair VS650
\$85 www.corsair.com

This affordable PSU delivers a clean and reliable source of energy.



SOUND

Audio Technica ATH-A500X w/ASUS Xonar DG
\$159 + \$33 www.audio-technica.com



OPTICAL

Lite-on DVD-RW
\$49 www.us.liteonit.com

This is the one bit of kit that stays the same between most of our machines.



STORAGE

W.D. Caviar Black 1TB + Samsung 850 EVO 250GB
\$109 + \$165 www.wdc.com / www.samsung.com.au



DISPLAY

BenQ XL2411T
\$379 www.benq.com.au

BenQ's 24-inch not only looks great, it'll also save your eyesight with a 144Hz refresh rate.



CASE

Fractal Design Define R5
\$159 www.fractal-design.com

Our new favourite mid-tower.



KEYBOARD

Logitech G710+
\$139 www.thermaltake.com.au

Logi's new mechanical board is one for them to beat.



MOUSE

Logitech G502 Proteus
\$59 www.logitech.com

Deadly accurate and super comfortable.



TOTAL: \$2,418

PREMIUM

Crank everything to Ultra, including your credit limit

CPU

Intel 4th Generation Core i7-4790K + Corsair H100i GTX Water Cooling Kit
\$469 + \$179 www.intel.com



MOBO

ASUS Maximus VII Ranger
\$249 www.asus.com.au

One of our favourite Z97 boards



RAM

G.SKILL 16Gb (2x 8Gb) DDR3-1600
\$165 www.gskill.com

16Gb for our Premium PC



VIDEO

2 X Gigabyte GV-N980WF30C-4GD GeForce GTX 980 4GB
\$1500 www.gigabyte.com.au



POWER

Corsair HX1000i
\$299 www.corsair.com

A high end PSU to ensure stable overlocks.



SOUND

Audio Technica ATH-ADG1 headphones
\$249 audio-technica.com

We've ditched the soundcard



OPTICAL

Pioneer Optical Disc Drive (ODD) Internal Blu-ray Combo Drive
\$118 www.pioneer.com.au



STORAGE

W.D. Caviar Black 1TB + Samsung SSD 850 EVO 500GB
\$109 + \$305 www.wdc.com / www.samsung.com.au



DISPLAY

ASUS PB278Q 27"
\$599 www.asus.com.au

This huge monitor delivers pixel-perfect 2560 x 1440 resolution, at a fantastic price.



CASE

NZXT Switch 810 Full Tower
\$185 www.nzxt.com

It's big, it's beautiful, and it's also nice and quiet.



KEYBOARD

Corsair K70 RGB
\$235 www.corsair.com

This is PCPP's favourite keyboard, case closed.



MOUSE

Logitech G502 Proteus
\$69 www.logitech.com

Deadly accurate and super comfortable.



TOTAL: \$4,538



THE BEAST

When overkill is barely enough...



CPU

**Intel 4th Generation Core i7 4790K
+ XSPC RayStorm D5 RX240 V3
Water Cooling Kit**

\$469 + \$587

www.intel.com

www.pccasegear.com.au



HEADPHONES + SOUND CARD

**Audio Technica ATH-ADG1
headphones**

\$249

www.audio-technica.com

Plug these into the Marantz amp for maximum sound quality.



MOBO

**Gigabyte Z97X Gaming G1
WiFi Black Edition**

\$479 www.gigabyte.com.au

This high end Z97-based board has plenty of room for more GPUs when you decide to upgrade, and it's chock full of extras



STORAGE

**2 x Samsung SSD 850
EVO 1TB, 3 x WD 1TB
Velociraptor**

\$1000 + \$1000

www.wdc.com

www.samsung.com



RAM

**Corsair Dominator
Platinum 4 x 4GB DDR3
2400MHz**

\$338 www.corsair.com

It doesn't get much faster than this.



DISPLAY

Epson TW9200W

\$3800

www.epson.com.au

Beautiful 1920 x 1080 gaming. Unfortunately you won't be able to do 3D gaming at anything higher than 720p due to the limitations of HDMI 1.4.



VIDEO

**3 x Asus GeForce
GTX Titan X**

\$5217 www.asus.com.au

Even one of these cards is insane.



CASE

**Cooler Master Cosmos II
Ultra Tower**

\$379

www.coolermaster.com

It's big, it's beautiful, and it's also nice and quiet. The compartmentalised interior ensures everything runs ice-cool.



POWER

**Silverstone
1500wST1500 Strider**

\$315 www.silverstone.com

1500W should be plenty for the three GPUs running alongside an overclocked CPU, as well as the storage within.



INPUT DEVICES

**SteelSeries Sensei RAW optical +
Xbox 360 USB Wireless Dongle +
Xbox 360 wireless controller**

\$69 + \$40 + \$40

www.logitech.com



KEYBOARD

Corsair K70 RGB

\$235

www.corsair.com

This is PCPP's favourite keyboard, case closed.



STEERING WHEEL

**Fanatec ClubSport Wheel
base, Formula Carbon and
CSP v2 Pedals**

\$589 + \$239 + \$329 www.fanatec.de

There's nothing better than "Germengineering" to deliver the most precise force feedback around.



SPEAKERS

**Paradigm Cinema 110 with dual
subwoofers and Paradigm
monitor center channel
+ Marantz SR5009 amp**

\$3299

www.eastwoodhifi.com.au



JOYSTICK

Logitech G940

\$385

www.logitech.com

This Force Feedback set is getting harder to find, but it's still the finest flight controller around.



OPTICAL

**Pioneer Optical Disc Drive
(ODD) Internal Blu-ray
Combo Drive**

\$118 www.pioneer.com.au

Putting in a Blu-ray drive allows it to double as a powerful media box.



COCKPIT

**Obutto oZone with Buttkicker
gamer 2 and TrackIR 5 Pro**

\$1100

You're going to need somewhere to mount your wheel and joystick, and the Obutto frame is a favourite of ours.



TOTAL: \$20,276

Wireless-AC2400

Fastest Speed, Widest Coverage, Easiest Setup, Richest Features.



ANDROID EMULATION

ASHLEY MCKINNON dreams of electric sheep



Most people fit into either the Android or Apple iOS mould while some others opt for the Microsoft offering. Regardless of where you sit, you have to admit that Android is a very capable OS and is popping up on a lot of devices designed to make your life easier and more feature rich. From phones to media boxes and even car infotainment, Android is definitely here to stay and just gets better and better with each new update.

If you have an interest in Android but don't want to mess around with your phone, tablet or other device there is another option available will leave your current device intact. Installing an Android emulator on your PC allows you to play around with the Android OS, install apps, customise and pretty much do anything you can do on your phone (except of course make phone calls).

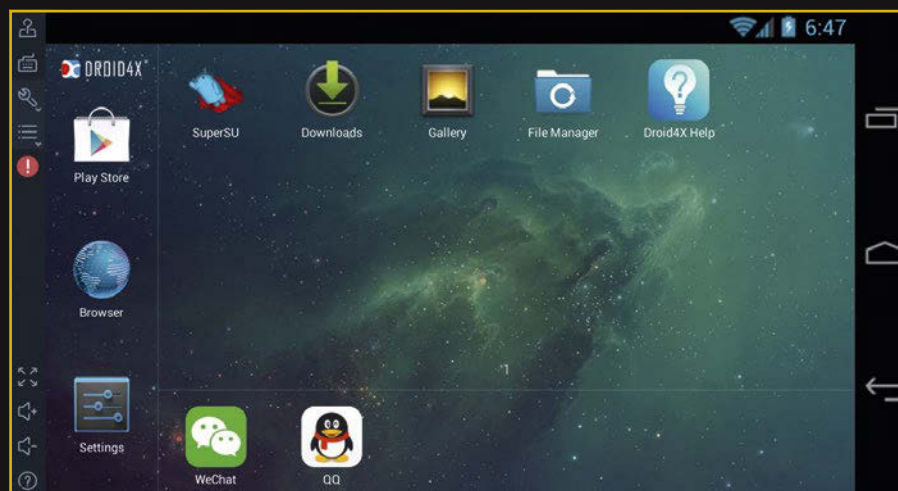
Android emulators have been around almost as long as Android itself – but today's emulators are much easier to install and a lot slicker to use.

There are several options available for Android Emulation, but the one that we'll concentrate on here is one of the latest available called Droid4X (available for free download from www.droid4x.com).

Once you have downloaded the installation file from their website just double click `droid4xinstaller.exe` to install (be advised that installation can take upwards of 30 seconds to start – so don't keep clicking the installer file thinking it's not working). After installation and running for the first time, Droid4x will finalise setup and show a few general use screens to familiarise you with the emulator. Make sure you read these as they give you pretty detailed info on how to use the emulator. After reading all the tutorial screens and clicking "OK, I got it", you'll be presented with the emulator screen, which itself replicates a standard Android screen like on your phone or other android device.

Down on the bottom left of the screen you have the familiar Android navigation buttons – back, home and recent apps. On the bottom right of the screen are some Windows specific buttons which allow you to do things like expand the screen, phone control, and setup the keyboard as a control for the emulator.

If you already run an Android phone you should now take the opportunity to click on the Play Store button and log into your account (if you don't I suggest creating a Google account so you can at least download some free apps). Once you sign in you'll be asked if you want to



backup this device to your Google account – your call but not really necessary as this is just an emulator. Once your account is logged in you'll be taken to the Google Play store.

Installing apps into the emulator can be achieved in two different ways. You can do it through the Google Play store and simply browse to the App you want and click to install.

If you already have access to an APK (the android app installer) file then you can browse to it to install. Click on the Settings button up in the top right of the emulator screen and select APK install. You can then browse to your desired APK file to install.

Another option is to create a shared folder between the Android Emulator and your desktop. Click on the Settings button in the top right of the screen and then select Share Folder. Browse to the folder on your desktop that

Android is definitely here to stay and just gets better and better with each new update

you would like to use as the shared folder and select. The shared folder sets itself up on the emulator as `/sdcard/droid4xshare`.

Installed apps show up on the home screen of the emulator just as they would on an Android phone.

You may be asking yourself now what is it I can use this emulator for. Well, you can try out any Android Apps before installing to your phone. Or you can play around with Android settings without wrecking your phone. For those not familiar with Android this could be a nice introduction into how Android looks and feels.

Another nice idea is you can play your Android games on your larger PC/Notebook

Apps appear on your desktop like they would on an Android phone

screen – you can maximise the emulator to run in Full Screen mode and play that way – of course – for the full effect you should do this on a PC / Notebook that has a touch screen – most android games are designed around a touch screen.

Another interesting feature of Droid4x is that you can use your phone as a controller for your PC. This way you can run Android games in the emulator on your PC but use your phone as the controller for them. Simply go back to the Droid4x website (www.droid4x.com) and this time click on the Download Controller link on the left side.

You'll be asked to QR Code Scan the version you want – either for Android or for Apple iOS (yes – you can control an Android Emulator from your Apple iOS device – the wonders of modern technology). Once installed on your device you'll be asked for the IP Address of the system running the emulator. Not sure on the IP Address of your system – simply click on the joystick button at the bottom of the emulator window and it will tell you under Step 2 of the connection guide. Once the connection has been established you will now see on the screen of your phone the same as what is on the screen of your emulator.

You can now use your phone as a navigation device for your emulator. Rotate your phone (or tablet if you have an android tablet) and your emulator screen rotates. There is a little lag between your device and your emulator screen but it runs pretty smoothly. Now you can use your phone to play your Android games on a larger screen.

Or, if you are creative – start writing that killer Android App or Game which will fund your early retirement. There's nothing holding you back now. **PC**

PCPP COMPS

Welcome to the PCPP competitions page! With the office positively overflowing in PC gaming goodies, it's become so difficult to do our ridiculously awesome jobs that we decided to pass the savings onto you. And by savings, we mean free stuff. Games, collectibles, swag, and all kinds of media that screams PC gaming. Or perhaps those are the screams of the intern trapped under the boxes of giveaways. Only one way to save them: Head to www.pcpowerplay.com.au to enter!

To find the competitions, simply mouse over the "Community" tab in the main menu at the top of the homepage, and click on "Competitions". Click through to each individual competition page, fill out the form (be sure to agree to the terms and conditions) and you'll be in the running to win! Keep an eye out for this page in future issues of PCPP, as we roll out new competitions every month!

WIN



Dragon Ball Z: Battle of Gods & Attack on Titan: Collection 1

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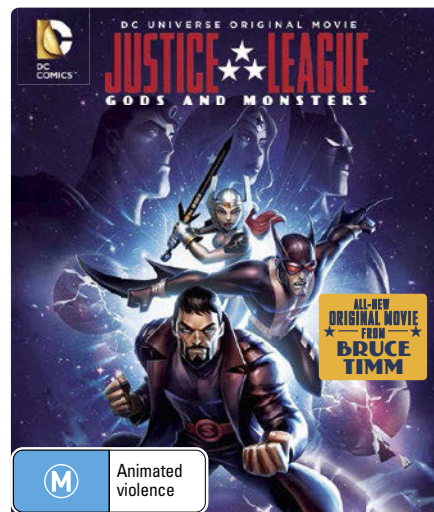
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MA/242

E3 Never Changes

JOSHUA LUNDBERG spends 364 days a year in a Vault

Another year, another Electronic Entertainment Expo. With attendance spiking for the first time in years, it looks as if the conference which seemed to be approaching irrelevance has become, well... relevant again.

To be honest I barely noticed E3, with some exceptions. I was buried in 7 Days To Die for a fortnight. I doubt that differs much for most PC gamers, given the lack of interesting content. The exception would be Fallout 4.

I never played the original Fallouts growing up. As mentioned ad nauseum I didn't play much beyond FPS and RTS games, and isometric RPGs left me vexed - they lacked immersion.

Needless to say, that is entirely wrong.

When Fallout: New Vegas was approaching I purchased Fallout 3 to see if I could get into it. A close friend had played countless hours of the game on Xbox 360 and I'd always watched how much he enjoyed it. Watching people play games has, as an adult, been a pastime I very much enjoy - so long as it's accompanied by explanations and descriptions of why the player likes or dislikes the game. Any thoughts on it at all, really, but it's certainly most interesting when it's a game that has been played almost endlessly.

I put three hours into Fallout 3. I finished the Vault section, entered the world, went to Megaton and then went off straight to find my father. Big mistake. Huge.

It's not often that people play games incorrectly, in my mind. I think they can misunderstand the intent of the developers or play in a manner that's more like exploitation than an adherence to the intended experience.

I quit after three hours. It was too hard too quickly. I kept dying and the world felt cramped - terribly cramped. I didn't explore the wasteland or anything else for that matter. I played it like an FPS. I had played Bethesda's Oblivion, so I wasn't unfamiliar with the style of game, I just somehow missed the point. It's desperately sad, because I'd deprived myself of many hours of phenomenal gameplay.

I eventually bought Vegas and put 24 hours or so into the game before, regrettably, isolating myself from so many factions I broke the game. I really had enjoyed it, and I very much liked the addition of iron sights to the combat.

But as I was yet to learn, gunplay is so very far from the point of the Fallout series.

Around the time the teaser for Fallout 4 went live I decided to reinstall Fallout 3 and throw a bunch of mods into the mix. I read guides on Fallout 3 mods, installed Nexus manager and went crazy with the downloads. I focused on graphics mods, because I didn't want to alter the gameplay and potentially miss some of the experience my friends had playing it on release.

I remembered my friend telling me he replayed the game simply because he missed a bobblehead collectable in an office in the Vault at the start. I made sure to grab it and went on my way.

Having poured more time into RPGs since my first venture into the game I checked stats, ensured I was armoured as best I could be and I went around accepting quests. I very much enjoyed working on Wasteland Survival Guide, and it was incredibly helpful for

■ Having been a latecomer to RPGs, the genius of V.A.T.S went entirely over my head ■

gathering experience, increasing my general stats and collecting a heap of gear and items. It played a role in me wandering into the wilderness, which is where you're meant to go. DC is meant to seem formidable, not the core of the game; the way I played the first time I completely robbed myself of this feeling.

The wasteland is huge. In the context of open-world games in 2015 it's not all that big, but for the time it was a large playable area. I don't mean to sound dismissive, either - it really is a huge and ambitious game. I have spent hours wandering around it, and only venture into DC when the Wasteland Guide needed me to; it was then that I slipped into the world of Post-Apocalyptic Washington D.C. as my quests drew me further and further in. I longed for the wasteland, so I found myself leaving and exploring the outside world, heading north past the minefield I'd ventured earlier in my quest line.

The patrols and nomadic merchants help to make Fallout marvellous. Just as the

world begins to feel empty I come across unscripted firefights. I like that a stray bullet from my gun could send me into conflict with a faction and change the game entirely.

I'm quite a few hours in and I'm starting to feel the pull of intrigue. I'm interested in how certain groups came to oppose each other, particularly the Brotherhood Outcasts. My first encounter with this faction was in the far north, but I have read their region is south. I am very excited to find out.


Although Bethesda titles never seem to carry the epic scale their subject matters tend to demand (a key reason why Oblivion didn't sit well with me), Fallout 3 has sufficient detail to make the low population make sense. And the world isn't sparse, it's simply a waste.

The gameplay is impressive, particularly the use of V.A.T.S. Having been a latecomer to RPGs, the genius of V.A.T.S went entirely over my head; to successfully translate the targeting system of a turn-based isometric RPG made by a different developer to a three dimensional reimagining is quite a feat.

My relationship with Bethesda games has been superficial and I've rarely given their titles the time or effort they deserve. Morrowind, Oblivion, Fallout 3, New Vegas - I never put in the effort to get to know and understand them. Skyrim felt good to me, and I put 26 hours or so into the game before a bizarre conflict with the College of Winterhold broke my savegame (I never crossed them, but I couldn't enter the region without being hunted and killed).

None of the titles mentioned are bad games. I do think that Oblivion isn't a great game, though; I felt the scale of the story was undermined entirely by the shortcomings of the engine. As always that's subjective.

The trailers for Fallout 4 communicate to me that Bethesda are on a perpetual adventure; with each game they develop, they never cease to demonstrate incredible ambitions, and that is what we want to see in our games. Sometimes it works and sometimes it doesn't. Their games can break in strange ways or feel empty as Oblivion did to me. Whatever the result I know I don't want them to stop doing what they do; it would be like a brilliant artist putting down their brush never to pick it up again.

I'm just sorry I didn't play past titles long enough to appreciate their work until recently. 





So Uncivilised

Alessandro Guarrera journeys through the universe of 4X games

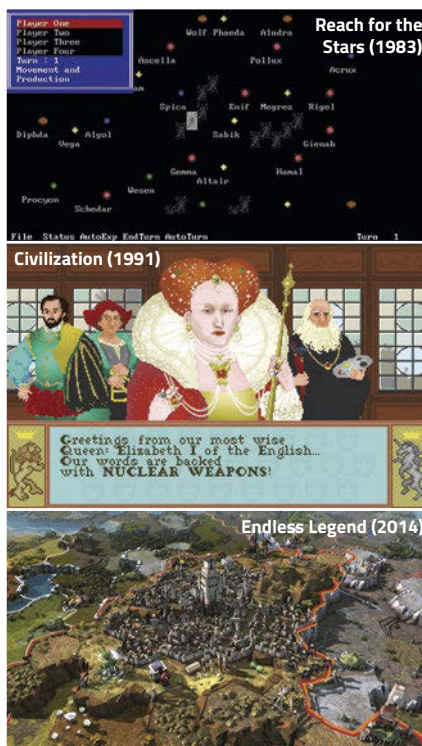
“MicroProse’s Strategic Space Opera Is Rated XXXXI!”

People love a good headline, especially one that references sex; sex sells. Alan Emrich knew this, which is why he used those words to headline his review of Master of Orion. More than just a playful pun on pornographic pronouncements, the four exes that Emrich used stood for key features that resonated to him from the game: the ability to explore, expand, exploit, and exterminate. Those four exes are often the phases of gameplay a player undertakes to win; scouting the map, growing their forces, gathering resources, and eliminating enemies.

What made Master of Orion and its predecessors, particularly Civilization, in the 4X sub-genre so different from Real-Time-Strategy games is that they often feature advanced diplomacy as opposed to the typical friend/foe demarcations, greater scale, and an actual sense for strategy, rather than the tactics based approach of the RTS; 4X games force players to consider waging a campaign and building an empire, managing resources, economies, and navigating through alliances, rather than simply winning battle after battle.

Like many strategy games, the 4X sub-genre has its origin in tabletop games and the pen-and-paper adventures players would have, before moving into the digital text-based realm. The first games retroactively recognised as 4X are Andromeda Conquest (1982), and Reach for the Stars (1983). However, it wasn’t until Sid Meier released Civilization that the genre gained some much-needed traction.

Civilization’s selling point was that it gave players the control of a Civilization, from the Stone Age, to the Space Age. Viewed from a top down perspective, Civilization let gamers explore the game’s maps, advance their technologies over the course of millennia, gather and produce materials, develop and deploy their military might, while considering religious, cultural, and other differences when it came to foreign negotiations and trade. That said, being a benevolent contemporary in the world, particularly in the earlier games, was never the best option; allies, even if their armies were toothless, would demand resources while threatening to break alliances, or even declare war. That said, if players didn’t wish to beat the game by conquering the world,



Computer Gaming World called the game “more addictive than crack”

they would have to reach the other win condition, sending a ship to Alpha Centauri

Meier’s mix of Sim-City style elements – extensive micromanagement and tracking units’ emotional states – and traditional tactical combat, made Civilization a wild success. Computer Gaming World called the game “more addictive than crack”. Given that there is a satirical ‘Civilization Anonymous’ website on the wild reaches of the internet, maybe this should be the quote on the next game’s box-art. What is certain is this: Civilization spawned a genre of games which, due to the many features which players both unlocked and looked upon unlocking, along with its ‘long-game’ style objectives, meant play sessions would stretch on for hours as gamers vainly promised themselves that their current turn would be their last.

The games that followed brought on their

own innovations: Civilization 2 had its ‘high-council’, a series of live action recordings of actors in various states of costume, depending on the player’s progression through history. The high council would give the player advice, and provide an element of comic relief, particularly through the councilman for the people’s happiness; an Elvis impersonator with a somewhat questionable impersonation, who would wear sunglasses regardless of his costume. Civ 2 was more than the average game to its players; Reddit user Lycerius held a decade long Civilization game. Dubbed ‘the Eternal war’, the game had played out like Orwell’s Nineteen Eighty-Four, with three opposing nations constantly warring against each other.

While it codified the methods and characteristics typical to the genre, Civilization is far from the only 4X game. The success of RTS games saw the 4X sub-genre take on RTS elements, becoming real-time affairs, rather than turn-based. 1997’s Imperium Galactica was the first of these games. More followed; Sword of the Stars (2006), and Sins of a Solar Empire – the first game to be marketed as a RT4X game, revealing just how hybridized the formula was becoming. Not that these were the first; 4X elements were seen across more games, with titles like the Battle for Middle Earth series, and Rise of Nations, muddying the waters by mixing elements of both to make games which let players who are unwilling to commit to the undertaking of playing a 4X game get the best of both worlds.

While the genre is dominated with games set in outer space, probably because the scope of the universe suits 4x games, there seems to be some change afoot; Endless Space, a game which really needs more love, was followed in 2014 by Endless Legend. Unlike the usual sci-fi or historical affair, Endless Legend is a fantasy game, giving players control of magic and mythical creatures to fulfil Alan Emrich’s four exes.

Across the scores of games, the same table-top influences are felt – not surprising when you look at the interface. Regardless of whether it is part of the legion of sci-fi titles, historical, or fantasy 4X games, they all still have the same old sense of scope, detail, passion, and something born of childlike imagination these games need to feel alive.

Pretty good for something whose name comes from the yellowest of marketing. PC

The Last Word

DANIEL WILKS believes that sharing is caring

If I have any overriding trait, it is that I am a collector. It is a compulsion that informs much of my life. I collect many things. I have bookshelves filling most of the walls in my flat filled with thousands of DVDs and BDs, a huge number of books and comics, drawers full of videogames, some for platforms I no longer own. I have display cases full of rocks and shells, a number of WWII cigarette lighters, a collection of antique shaving gear, I obsessively collect obscure facts. I am compelled to collect things, not for the owning, but for the sharing. To me, the true joy of any collection, or any passion, is the sharing – introducing people to things they may not have been familiar with, or sharing the joy of discovering something new yourself.

It surprises me that in this hobby of ours – I am of course talking about gaming – that this idea of sharing the passion does not seem to be particularly prevalent. If anything, there are many avenues of gaming that seem to be actively exclusionary, putting up a wall to prevent newcomers from sharing the collective passion or otherwise actively discouraging new players from getting involved. In the last few weeks, leading up to my review of Heroes of the Storm, I tried my hand at a few other MOBAs, trying to get a genuine feel for a genre that I have had little exposure to. To say that the community was unwelcoming would be an understatement.

This does not make sense to me. MOBAs are one of the most popular types of games around today, with millions of gamers spending countless hours duking it out over the lanes. Coming in as someone who hasn't played a MOBA in any serious way in years, I was behind the curve already when it came to the current balance, popular heroes and meta, even after doing copious reading to try and bone up on the basics. Even expecting to have to battle for acceptance I wasn't prepared for the torrent of team abuse I got for not knowing everything there was to know about a map or the hero I had chosen. My character choice was mocked, my lack of team strategy knowledge was derided and I was made to feel unwelcome playing. There were a few teams that were willing to give me pointers, but for the most part I was talked down to and made to feel unwelcome.

MOBAs aren't the only games I've played in which the community has put up a wall against new players, only the most recent I have experienced. Surely if you love something as much as these players do you want other people to share in, experience and ultimately spread that love. Extending the community and bringing in more new players can be nothing other than a good thing for games. Sure, new players might be behind the curve when it comes to initial skill and game knowledge, but a little coaching and a welcoming atmosphere can bring new players up to speed in a very short while.


Excluding people does nothing but set up an "us versus them" dynamic, something that is only good at perpetuating stereotypes rather than growing a community or building a hobby. Unfortunately everyone seems to be guilty of perpetuating this dynamic in some way or other. The recent release of Hatred is a

■ ■ There were a few willing to give me pointers, but for the most part I was talked down to and made to feel unwelcome ■ ■

perfect example of this divide, with both sides of the GamerGate/SJW bullshit exacerbating each other's arguments – the more journalists took umbrage with the game or looked for additional avenues to discredit the developers, the more those in support of the game dug in and fired back with salvos of free speechifying and claims that the so called SJWs were trying to exclude games they found offensive. This of course led to counterclaims that the supporters of the game were perpetuating a gaming environment that was unwelcoming to certain sections of the gaming public and so on. The fact that the game itself is terrible means nothing: two opposing factions trying to keep the other out. Aside from giving a game that didn't deserve a platform a huge PR push, this debate achieved nothing aside from perpetuating bullshit.

Much closer to home, this idea of keeping people out rather than welcoming them

into the gaming fraternity reared its head when an Australian games journo was apparently removed from a position he had only had for a single week after a few people informed his superiors that they would not work with or attend events promoted by a supporter of GamerGate. While I vehemently disagree with a number of his views, find his support for GameGate to be naive at best and have heard conflicting reports about the circumstances surrounding the job loss, the idea of people actively trying to exclude him from the industry smacks not only of pettiness but of hypocrisy. One of the major arguments against GamerGate has been the treatment of a number of women in the gaming industry and community and the fact that they have been hounded out of their homes and livelihood by anonymous internet dickbags. Doing the same thing to someone that has professed support of GamerGate not only smacks of petty revenge, it also gives some grounding the what was, for the most part, the flimsy argument that GamerGate stands for the fight against journalistic corruption and collusion. By putting pressure on a company to fire someone they don't agree with, those involved have actively given GG something to rally around as concrete proof of their claims. If the claims are true, of course.

Here's my idea. It's pretty revolutionary. Instead of fighting for the purity of our chosen games, or continuously trying to shout down anyone who has a different opinion that you hold, how about we try and talk. Hell, maybe we could even have some fun together. The only way that any of these us versus them situations can ever be productively resolved is to get rid of the "them" part, not by forcing them further away but by inviting them in and making them us. Invite people to try your games and offer help to new players rather than scorn for the fact that they don't have hundreds of hours of experience and a deep knowledge on day one. Don't immediately dismiss opposing ideals and if you have to argue a point, argue on facts rather than feelings and emotions. There is great joy in introducing something you love to someone new. We should be coming together to make the gaming community welcoming for everyone, not fracturing into factions dedicated to keeping others out. 



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